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**POLITICAL OCCITANISM 1974-2000:  
EXPLORING THE  
MARGINALISATION OF AN  
ETHNOREGIONALIST MOVEMENT**

**SANDRA ELIZABETH RITSON**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**April 2006**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis investigates the political wing of the Occitan ethnoregionalist movement in the south of France from 1974, a point when it had a comparatively high profile, to 2000, and analyses the reasons for its marginalisation over time. Unlike other ethnoregionalist movements in France, it has been subject to little academic research. A study was made of documentary sources, including the internal bulletins of the political organizations and their published journals, which made possible a micro-level perspective on the movement, and revealed some inaccuracies of interpretation by previous researchers.

An overview of the evolution of the political wing is established. An evaluation of the functioning and effectiveness of the organizations, which identifies their internal problems, is followed by an investigation of the external factors which contributed to the marginalisation of the Occitan movement. These include the geographical, historical, demographic and socio-linguistic factors which have differentiated the Occitan movement from other French ethnoregionalist movements, and made mobilization of the target audience difficult. By taking a global view of Occitania, rather than focussing, like previous researchers, on Languedoc, the study highlights the extent to which such factors made the movement's aims for political autonomy for the whole of the territory unrealistic. The relative success of the movement in the mid 1970s resulted from the fact that for a period its aims were congruent with the wave of social movement activity in post-1968 France, but the association was not deep-seated. In the 1980s and 1990s the effects of the decentralization reforms and the growth of the Front National had a negative effect on the movement's mobilizational potential. The issue of leadership, referred to briefly in previous studies, is subjected here to more detailed analysis, and is revealed as a significant factor in the weakness of political Occitanism.



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# **PART ONE CONTEXT**

## **Chapter 1 The research project**

### **1.1 Introduction and aims**

The thesis investigates the evolution of the political wing of the Occitan ethnoregionalist movement in the south of France in the period 1974 – 2000, and analyzes the reasons for the difficulties which it encountered, in particular its inability to mobilize the population of the area in support of its aims. This topic is a neglected area of academic research. Unlike, for example, the Corsican, Breton, Basque and Catalan ethnoregionalist movements, there has been no in depth examination of the organization and functioning of the political groups which sought to gain greater autonomy for the territory in which the Occitan language is, or has been, spoken. The few published studies of the Occitan movement existing at the time of the commencement of the research programme in 2000 were partial, in that they were limited either in terms of the time scale covered, the geographical area referred to, or in their focus largely on the cultural aspects of the movement. Political analyses tended to be based on limited source materials, which led to some errors of fact and interpretation, and to view the political organizations from the perspective of the French administrative system.

Writing in 1986, at a time which subsequently proved to be a transitional point for its political wing, just before the creation of the Partit Occitan in 1987, Keating described the Occitan movement as a failure (Keating 1986). The initial working hypothesis of the current study examined the possibility that by taking the long view over the period 1974 – 2000, it might be possible to modify this assessment. However, at an early stage, from the many primary sources consulted, mounting evidence suggested that though one can argue for a certain degree of success in the form of the recuperation of some of the movement's ideas by mainstream political parties, the main political ideas of the movement were not attained, there has been little success in the electoral arena, and the political expression of

the movement has become increasingly marginalised over time. It was therefore decided to shift the focus of the thesis towards an exploration of the reasons for this marginalisation (when during the same period for example, the Corsican ethnoregionalist movement, operating within the same political and administrative system, has maintained a high profile, and succeeded in gaining increased autonomy).

It became apparent that in order to carry out this investigation, which required an analysis of factors internal and external to the Occitan political organizations, in the absence of any existing coherent chronological study it would be necessary to produce a micro-level history of the movement<sup>1</sup>. This then became the first objective of the research programme, and explains the format of the thesis. After Part one, which explains the research project, the research methods and the context for the study, Part two provides a historical overview of the Occitan movement since 1974. It examines the political organizations, their programmes, activities, and membership, and in so doing reveals some of the internal factors which constituted a source of weakness. As the aims of the organizations included the defence and promotion of the Occitan language, and many members were active also in purely cultural organizations such as the Institut d'Etudes Occitanes (IEO), whilst socio-linguistic factors impacted on the potential for mobilization of their target population, the links between the political and cultural wings of the movement were investigated. An examination of their involvement in the social movement activity in France in the 1970s, in defence of the farmers of the Larzac plateau and the viticulteurs of Languedoc, highlighted the issue of mobilization methods, in the context of what appears to be the most successful period for political Occitanism. Part three analyzes the reasons why the political wing of the Occitan movement has failed to achieve its aims. It examines the geographical and demographic factors which have militated against effective mobilization of the population of Occitania and insists on the need to refer to the whole of Occitania, rather than concentrating on the lesser territory of the Occitan part of the administrative region of Languedoc- Roussillon. Attention is drawn to the significance of the existence of Occitanian territory outside France, within the Spanish and Italian states, a fact which is

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that during the course of the research process three publications relating to the Occitan movement appeared (Viaule 2003, Lavelle 2004, Chartier and Larvor 2004). As discussed in the literature review, whilst furthering the available information about the movement, none duplicated or invalidated the current study.

ignored in most existing studies. The chapter on external political factors which during the period under review reduced the potential for success of the movement focusses on those issues which were of specific significance to the Occitan movement, including the impact of the rise of the Front National within Occitan territory, rather than on factors common to all the ethnoregionalist groups in France. Brief reference is made in the existing literature to the significance of the relationship between Robert Lafont and Yves Rouquette, as leaders of the Occitan movement. The chapter devoted to the issue of leadership as a vector of success for an ethnoregionalist movement, extends the analysis of their contribution, both positive and negative, examines in depth their roles, and that of Gustave Alirol as leader of the Partit Occitan, and argues for greater emphasis to be placed on limitations in leadership as a contributory source of weakness for the movement. Finally, a chapter is devoted to a closer examination of the problems associated with the efforts of the Occitan political groups to mobilize certain sections of the Occitan population, workers and their representatives the Trade Unions, women, and the young, and of the methods which were used to promote mobilization.

## **1.2 An explanation of the choice of dates**

1974 was chosen as the starting point of the current study for a number of reasons. One of the objectives was to extend the study of political Occitanism chronologically. The period up to 1968 is covered in definitive fashion by Abrate's thesis presented in 1987, and published in 2001 (Abrate 2001). The period 1968 to 1976 is analyzed in the unpublished thesis of Formaggio (Formaggio 1976). No detailed chronological account updates the subsequent political history of the movement. 1974 was described by Touraine as a significant turning point for the movement, with the establishment of the group Volem Viure al País (VVAP), which very quickly became its principal political force (Touraine 1981a: 48). It is possible to trace the evolution of political Occitanism by following the growth and decline of VVAP, its replacement in 1987 by the Partit Occitan, and their relationship with other less significant Occitan political groups, and with the mainstream French political parties. In order to place this evolution in context, Chapter three summarizes the history of the Occitan movement up to 1974. Although reference is made to the circumstances of the ethnic revival in western Europe in the period after 1968,

circumstances which are abundantly covered in existing academic literature, and to the transition to the 'new regionalism' in Europe during the 1980s and 1990s, the aim was not to address theoretical issues of general application, but to develop a case study of political Occitanism, to remedy a deficiency in the existing literature. The emphasis is less on the factors which stimulated ethnoregionalist mobilization in France from the mid 1960s, but rather on an examination of the factors, specific to Occitanism, which meant that initial mobilization of some sectors of the population was not maintained. The end point of the study, 2000, emphasizes the fact that it is conceived as a historical study, and not as a sociological study of the political groups as they currently function.

### **1.3 An explanation of the term Occitania**

Occitania, Occitanie in French, is the name given to a geographical area defined by its linguistic origins<sup>1</sup>. It comprises those areas to the south of the Loire where the inhabitants speak, or spoke in the past, one of the variants of the langue d'oc, rather than the langue d'oïl, spoken to the north. The languages were identified by their terms for the word 'yes'. This territory makes up approximately the southern third of France, excluding Corsica, and those areas in the south-west where Basque was spoken to the west of the Pyrenees, and Catalan to the east of the Pyrenees, in Roussillon. It includes, beyond the French frontiers, a number of upper alpine valleys in Piedmont, Italy, and the Val d'Aran in the Pyrenees, within the Spanish state (Barelli et al 1980: 16). According to Lafont, the terms Occitanie and Langue d'Oc were synonymous, appearing at the same time at the end of the thirteenth century to designate the same area. Between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries the French royal administration was responsible for the creation of a smaller area known as the province of Languedoc. However, during the nineteenth century, writers, historians and academic students of dialect still referred to Occitanie to designate the whole of the linguistic domain (Lafont 1974: 17). Twentieth century redrawing of administrative boundaries have retained the name Languedoc, most recently in 1972 as part of the creation of the region of Languedoc- Roussillon. The Occitan territory falls within thirty-two French départements, and covers the regions of Aquitaine (excluding the northern Basque

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<sup>1</sup> See maps Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.



Country), Midi-Pyrénées, the départements of Aude, Hérault, Gard and Lozère in Languedoc-Roussillon, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Limousin, Auvergne (excluding part of Allier), the Ardèche and Drôme départements of Rhône-Alpes, and a small amount of territory within Poitou-Charentes (Equipe d'animation pédagogique de l'Académie de Toulouse 1993: 15). The linguistic frontier is drawn roughly from Bordeaux to Briançon, passing approximately to the north of Limoges, Clermont- Ferrand and Valence (Alcouffe et al 1979: 15).

It is necessary to differentiate the meanings of the words 'Occitanie' and that of 'Midi' to designate the south of France. Occitanists point out that Midi is a 'terme qui sert de première approximation pour désigner l'Occitanie, mais terme inexact...' <sup>1</sup> (Comitat Occitan d'Estudis e d'Accion 1971: 229). Lavelle acknowledges that for French people, the limits and the identity of the Midi are vague concepts. He states that the Loire is typically regarded as the frontier between the north and the Midi, although there is an awareness that in fact the Midi starts further south <sup>2</sup>. Though they might consider that the Basque country was not part of the Midi, few would identify the Catalan Roussillon as not being part of the Midi. In common usage, there are degrees of 'miditude' (sic) perceived, dependant on climate, and the Mediterranean Midi is 'more Midi' than the Atlantic Midi. The term Midi has an implicit discourse which evokes sun, holidays and second homes (Lavelle 2004: 6). It is not a term which can be equated geographically with Occitania, which includes the Limousin and Auvergne, and territory in Spain and Italy. Its usage is decried by Occitanists, not only because of this inaccuracy, but also because the delineation of 'les Méridionaux' <sup>3</sup> in French literature is perceived as patronising and insulting, stereotyping them in a negative fashion (Lavelle 2004: 8-10).

#### **1.4 The Occitan language**

The Occitan language is a romance language, very close to Catalan, and many of its syntactic, lexical and phonetic features make it closer to Italian and to Spanish than to

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<sup>1</sup> Term which acts as a basic approximation to refer to Occitanie, but it is an inexact term.

<sup>2</sup> Hence the expression 'Le Midi commence à Valence'.

<sup>3</sup> The inhabitants of the Midi.

French (Barelli et al 1980: 17 and Telmon 1992: 119). In the twelfth century it produced a literature of high quality, and the poetry of the troubadours was known in Italy, Spain, England and Germany. The language was also used for legal and administrative purposes. Within the langue d'Oc a number of different dialects existed, in three broad groups: central Occitan (Languedocian and Provençal), north Occitan (Limousin, Auvergnat and alpine Provençal), and Gascon. Although inter-comprehension was usually possible, difficulties arose when at the time of the renewal of the language in the nineteenth century efforts were made to establish a commonly accepted written form for the language. From the thirteenth century the military conquest of Occitania after the Albigensian Crusade, and the centralizing activity of the French monarchy, led to a decline of the langue d'Oc. This was formalized by the Edict of Villers-Cotteret, 1539, which established French as the official language. Regarded subsequently as a 'patois', spoken by the lower orders, the langue d'Oc was further eroded at the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire as linguistic conformity was valued as a contribution to the establishment of control over the country, and as a means of its unification. The educational policy of the Third Republic, military service, and in the twentieth century population mobility and the effects of the mass media continued the decline, so that Occitan came to be spoken mainly in rural areas, and by the elderly (Equipe d'animation pédagogique de l'Académie de Toulouse 1993: 19-29). Although current academic thinking tends to play down the role and effectiveness of the state in enforcing linguistic conformity (Cohen 2000), the desire to restore a language which was perceived to have been 'persecuted' by the French state has played a significant role in Occitan activism. The words 'Ome d'Oc, as dreit a la paraula. Parla!'<sup>1</sup> appeared on posters and as graffiti on the walls of Occitan towns and villages after the events of May 1968, and became a visible symbol of the efforts of militants to gain greater autonomy for Occitania (Dupuy 1976: 131).

### **1.5 Definitions of terminology used in the study**

By the Occitan movement, is implied collectively all those who, either from a cultural or a political perspective, or both, have sought to defend and promote the Occitan language, to

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<sup>1</sup> Occitans, you have the right to speak. Speak!

promote the concept of Occitania as a territorial entity, to advance its economic development, and to seek, to a greater or lesser degree, enhanced political autonomy for that territory. Individuals within the movement may be referred to as Occitanists.

There is a problem of terminology to describe the political nature of the movement. As has been widely stated, the 'phenomenon of the revival of submerged ethnic or national minorities in Europe' (Loughlin 1987: 17) has been described by a range of expressions, such as 'nationalism', 'ethnic nationalism', 'micro-nationalism', 'minority nationalism', 'regionalism', and 'ethnoregionalism'. Crettiez, in his glossary of this terminology, stated that the expression ethnonationalism is 'peu précise et très polysémique'<sup>1</sup> (Crettiez 2000: 6), and this is true to some extent of all the terms. Keating warned that the 'categorization of territorial movements' is a 'methodological trap' (Keating 1988: 9)<sup>2</sup>. He cites Connor's distinction between ethnonationalism 'which denies the legitimacy of the existing state and is separatist, and regionalism, which recognises the state and merely seeks autonomy within it' (Keating 1988: 9). He goes on to indicate the ambiguities inherent in this distinction, citing the example of those who want to create a loosely structured Europe of the regions rather than a new and separate state. The term regionalism without a prefix can also be interpreted as the desire for greater autonomy in the form, for example, of locally elected regional assemblies for pre-existing administrative regions of the state, rather than for a larger ethnically or culturally defined territory. It is for this reason that the term 'ethnoregionalist' has been chosen to designate the Occitan movement as a whole in this thesis. Türsan states that 'ethnoregionalism rests upon regional identity claims to ethnic distinctiveness, as opposed to other kinds of regionalism', and denotes 'ethnically based territorial movements in Western European national states that aim to modify relations within the state' (Türsan 1998: 5). Implicit in this definition however is the requirement to clarify the usage of the word 'ethnic'. Turning again to Keating, 'the concept of ethnicity is even more slippery than that of nationalism' (Keating 1988: 10). Smith defined 'ethnic separatism' as being based on cultural differences and the sense of cultural distinctiveness which could be based upon the reality or myth of unique

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<sup>1</sup> Imprecise and capable of multiple meanings.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that in his article about the Occitan movement in 1986 he refers to regional nationalism (Keating 1986: 27), but in his sections on it in State and regional nationalism he describes it as Occitan regionalism (Keating 1988: 203 and 205).

cultural ties (Smith 1981: 13), and it is this attribution of cultural, rather than racial, distinctiveness as a marker of ethnicity which makes it possible to describe the Occitan movement as a whole as ethnoregionalist. Loughlin observed that language is usually taken as the starting point of an ethnic minority <sup>1</sup> (Loughlin 1986: 94) and indeed Occitanists themselves defined the word 'ethnie', ethnic group, as being used to define a human group distinguished 'essentiellement par la langue'<sup>2</sup> (Comitat Occitan d'Estudis e d'Accion 1971: 224).

Having established the use of the term ethnoregionalist to describe the Occitan movement as a whole, it will be necessary in the course of the thesis to place individual political groups, and individuals within groups, more precisely on the political spectrum. To give examples, the Parti Nationaliste Occitan (PNO), which is clearly separatist in its objectives, is more accurately described as an ethnonationalist organization. Within VVAP coexisted at different times members who were tempted towards, but not committed to, similar objectives as the PNO, and members who envisaged a federal system within France. During the course of the thesis the terminology will be refined to indicate more precisely points of view, bearing in mind that, as indicated above, individual members of the political organizations sometimes had conflicting interpretations of their aims, and that as Abrate has illustrated in the case of the evolution of Yves Rouquette's political thought (Abrate 2001: 537), ambiguities and inconsistencies existed in the views of individuals. Finally, it should be pointed out that an additional reason for accepting labels with some degree of scepticism is the fact that there was often a gulf between the stated aims of organizations, and the recognition by members that they would accept lesser benefits to their territory as a result of their pressure. It has been argued that the rhetoric of small movements such as those in France is often a means of placing the issue on the central political agenda (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 144), and, as Bidégaray states, 'un moyen de négocier avec l'Etat'<sup>3</sup> (Bidégaray 1997: 11).

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<sup>1</sup> Although, referring to Breton and Occitan, he incorrectly stated that Occitania like Brittany is geographically situated entirely within France.

<sup>2</sup> Essentially by language.

<sup>3</sup> A means of negotiating with the state.

## **1.6 Literature on the political aspects of the Occitan movement in the second half of the twentieth century**

Unlike the Breton, Corsican, Basque and Catalan regionalist movements, which are the subject of an extensive academic literature in many languages, there has been little published work on the contemporary Occitan political movement. The origin of this neglect may lie within the French academic system. The historian Philippe Martel, in a dossier entitled 'Questions aux chercheurs. Comment peut-on être chercheur occitan?'<sup>1</sup> (Amiras No.6 October 1983), argued that the Occitan area, as an entity, has not fallen within the scope of research subjects recognized by the French university system. Although Occitan history might be studied in a partial fashion in the context of regional history, and Occitan language and literature studied in departments of Romance or French language, Occitan research has been marginalised (Martel 1983: 53-54). Two theses exist, the unpublished thesis of Formaggio (1976) and that of Abrate, presented in 1987 and published in 2001. The two comparatively recent books in French which address this subject are the work of academics of Occitan origin, but working in foreign universities, Jeanjean in Australia (Jeanjean 1992) and Lavelle in Japan (Lavelle 2004). A large proportion of their works places the focus on the cultural wing of the movement. It should be stressed that the paucity of published sources, particularly on the period since 1986, available at the beginning of the current study confirmed the need to modify the initial questions 'during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem', a feature which Creswell notes is a characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell 1998: 19).

Some discussion of the Occitan situation can be found in theoretical studies of ethnic resurgence in western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. The centre-periphery theories of Rokkan and Urwin identify the periphery as territory which is defined by its distance from, difference from, and dependence on a political centre (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 3). The areas in the south of France which formed the Occitan territory were able to identify themselves with this paradigm in relation to Paris. Though references to Occitania appear in this theoretical literature (e.g. Esman 1977, Meny and Wright 1985) they tend to be brief,

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<sup>1</sup> Questions to researchers. How can one be an Occitan researcher?

and subsidiary to analyses of other regionalist movements. Beer included some analysis of the Occitan movement in his study of ethnic activism in contemporary France (Beer 1980). The numerous errors, including the incorrect definition of the territory concerned, the limited and inaccurate references to the groups involved (Beer 1980: 20) and the narrow time scale covered limit its contribution to this study. Keating made the fullest study of the movement 1968-1986 in an article (Keating 1986), which was later incorporated into his book on state and regional nationalism (Keating 1988). This is a valuable source, which provides an academic analysis of the situation at a point just before the decision was taken to establish the Partit Occitan. As Keating makes clear however, his focus was on 'the more restricted territory of Languedoc' (Keating 1986: 27), and he did not address the issue of the movement in the context of Occitania as a whole. It is also the case that his approach tends to be from the perspective of the French administrative context, rather than an examination at the micro-level from the interior of the Occitan political groups, and, as will be indicated in the course of the thesis, this led to some inaccuracies and oversimplifications of positions which changed over time, particularly in the case of the evolution of VVAP in the period 1980-1986. Brief references to the later evolution of the movement occur in some of the recent studies of the 'new regionalism' of the 1990s (e.g. Keating 1998, Wagstaff 1999), with reference to the Partit Occitan's membership of the European Free Alliance, but no published Anglo-Saxon source examines in depth the political evolution of the movement 1974-2000.

As already indicated, academic studies of the Occitan movement in French are limited. Most of the literature available in French is the work of authors actively engaged in the movement, and much of that dates from the period of intense militancy between 1968 and 1976. Although key examples will be referred to below, for a more detailed survey of the early period attention is drawn to the critical bibliography of the literature associated with the Occitan cause up until 1978 compiled by Christian Coulon (Coulon 1978). During the 1970s there was a certain amount of interest in the movement on the part of sociologists in France. Quéré made a study of the Occitan and Breton movements in the early 1970s, which indicates the heterogeneity of the movement from its politicization in the early 1960s. In his tracing of the populist phase of the movement he provides useful information

on its relationship with the wine producers of Languedoc (Quéré 1978). Touraine and his team of sociologists made a study of the movement at the end of the 1970s using the method of ‘sociological intervention’ (Touraine 1981a). The researchers met with groups of activists, and rather than merely interviewing them, proposed to them a series of hypotheses as to the nature of the movement, to challenge and provoke self-analysis, and to lead to change. This methodology, which Touraine explains (Touraine 1981a: 35-37 and 307- 313), means that the researchers engage actively in the situation being studied. As such, it is a controversial approach. Bell states that ‘Touraine’s method is open to question in that it... places the analyst in the position of a sort of midwife to (or disqualifier of) the movement being analyzed’ (Bell 2001: 187). Nevertheless this book acted as an essential source for the first phase of the current research. It indicates some of the weaknesses of the movement during the 1970s; the differing interpretations of the objectives of the movement; the nature of its relationship with the hexagonal political parties; the fragility of the links between the political and the cultural forms of action; the heterogeneity of the Occitan territory, and the differing economic priorities of different areas; the lack of a sense of identification of the population of Occitania with the territory or the culture. The reports of the group meetings with Occitan militants in Carcassonne, Montpellier, Limoges, Narbonne, Toulouse and Paris during 1979 and 1980 provide an opportunity not available elsewhere to hear the opinions of grassroots activists, (identified by employment and political affiliation), and their response to prominent members of the movement such as Yves Rouquette and Pierre Maclouf who were brought in to discuss with them. It should be noted, however, that the research process was regarded with suspicion by many of the Occitanists, who did not wish to participate (Rouquette interview 2003), and it was accused of perpetuating ‘Languedocian imperialism’<sup>1</sup> by its choice of venues for the meetings, so the study should not be regarded as being entirely representative of the movement as a whole at that period.

The unpublished thesis of political sociology by Formaggio (1976) is interesting in that it can be viewed as both a primary and a secondary source. His study of contemporary political Occitanism argues that the real aim of the movement since 1968 was to act as a

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 7.2 and 7.3

counter-culture to the values of contemporary French society, rather than to secure overtly political change. His interpretation of the development of Occitanism between 1968 and 1976 confirms the view that in that period the Occitan movement was perceived as being part of social movement activity. Coulon described this as the fullest account of contemporary Occitanism at that point (Coulon 1978: 96). As such it furnished valuable insights into the situation within the movement at an early stage of the current research project, along with some warnings on the difficulties associated with research of this type, difficulties which will be discussed in Chapter two.

The thesis of Abrate, produced in 1987 but published by the Institut d'Etudes Occitanes in 2001, provides a chronological survey of the evolution of Occitanist thought from 1900 to 1968, analyses the interplay of cultural and political activity at different periods, and discusses the role of key individuals. By his exhaustive study of the revues and political publications, and his translations from the Occitan of the originals, Abrate has brought into the public domain information difficult to access elsewhere. It has been accepted as a definitive study of the period, with Occitanists of different persuasions recognizing its objectivity. Rouquette has described it as 'un livre honnête'<sup>1</sup> (Rouquette interview September 2003). The book provides the historical context for the current research programme, and in particular supplies vital information on the early careers of Robert Lafont and Yves Rouquette, whose influence in the 1970s and 1980s is evaluated in Chapter nine.

'De l'utopie au pragmatisme? Le mouvement occitan 1976-1990' (Jeanjean 1992) is not as its title might suggest a coherent study of the evolution of the movement over time. The work of an Australian academic of Occitan origin, it is the publication of three pieces of research done in Occitania at different times, and using different methodologies. Part 1 consists of the author's dissertation to the University of Sydney in 1977. It examines the history of Occitania and outlines the growth of Occitan militantism after 1968. In style it reflects Jeanjean's own engagement with events in Occitania at that period. His sources were mainly militant tracts and periodicals, and the sometimes intemperate nature of his language suggests a less than critical acceptance of their terminology. He made the

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<sup>1</sup> A fair book.



decision not to revise this section, and thus it should be viewed as a primary source reflecting contemporary opinion, rather than as an objective study. Part 2 was produced during a stay in France in 1986, and consists of the author's synthesis of the responses to a questionnaire which he sent to thirty-six prominent members of the Occitan movement, broadly asking for their explanation for the apparent disappearance of the movement since his previous visit, and their views on its likely future development. There is no way of assessing the validity of Jeanjean's interpretation of the collected anonymous responses, none of which are cited individually. Part 3 is the result of research carried out in France in 1989-1990, to examine the response of the Occitanists to the changed political and economic situation. This section is particularly useful as Jeanjean had personal contact with people in the movement, and recorded his impressions of, for example, meetings of the recently formed *Partit Occitan*. His criticisms of what he observed indicated a number of weaknesses within the political wing. In his preface to the book Martel indicates some of its methodological weaknesses, but stresses its value as providing a 'snapshot' of different stages of Occitanism (Jeanjean 1992: 9) or, in another analogy, being like the geologists' bore which reveals samples of different strata (Jeanjean 1992: 7). As such it proved an essential source for the current study, but one which needed to be used with discretion.

Lavelle, currently an academic at the University of Osaka, and author of books in French on Japanese thought, has produced a book entitled '*Occitanie: histoire politique et culturelle*' (Lavelle 2004), which purports to be a history of the Occitans from their origins to the present day. The cover of the book indicates, however, that it is not a history of events, but rather an approach to mentalities and ideologies. Reviewed in *La Setmana*, it was described as an ambitious work, which would be a valuable source of reference for the student, the researcher, or those curious to know more about the past. Whilst praising Lavelle's use of an extensive and up-to-date documentation, the reviewer points out however that specialists of literature or of history will find here and there that a detail is missing, that a fact is questionable, or that a comment is open to debate (*La Setmana* 456 5/5/2004: 10). For the section which is relevant to the current research programme Lavelle's sources are mainly Abrate, Jeanjean, Tautil and Viaule (the latter two works reviewed below), although not all references are cited, and his book in no way adds to the

information available in those sources, except in his chapter on the Parti Nationaliste Occitan. Although this claims to be in part a political history, it is in fact strangely unbalanced in its coverage of the political wing of the Occitan movement. Lavelle devotes an entire chapter to the Parti Nationaliste Occitan and the thought of Fontan, its founder, and this is a valuable contribution to an understanding of their role in contemporary Occitanism. He makes no real analysis, however, of the contribution of other political groups. He mentions Lutte Occitane only briefly, and with inaccurate dates, and devotes less than a page to VVAP and a page and a half to the Partit Occitan (out of 557 pages) whilst dismissing the need to refer to ephemeral groups. It is wiser to consider this book as an introduction to the topic of Occitanism, for those who are unfamiliar with it, than as a serious contribution to academic knowledge.

A contribution to understanding the contemporary Occitan political movement, even though destined for the general public rather than being an academic study, comes from Chartier and Larvor (2004). The authors are journalists active in, and authors of a book on, the Breton regionalist movement (Chartier and Larvor 2002). With the intention of presenting to a wider audience the objectives and activities of regionalist, autonomist and separatist groups within metropolitan France, they carried out a series of interviews of activists, representing different facets of each movement, and each section has a brief summary of the evolution of the movement. It is possible that the authors' credentials as activists themselves encouraged a positive response from potential interviewees. The section on Occitania includes the results of interviews with Alirol, president of the Partit Occitan; two recent members of the Partit Occitan; Viaule, activist since the 1970s; Ressaire, president of the Parti Nationaliste Occitan since the death of Fontan; a member of Anaram au Patac in Béarn; Grosclaude, President of the Institut d'Etudes Occitanes, and leader of the now defunct Entau Païs; Lafont; and an individual whose extreme views have led him to advocate independence for Nice. This survey presents an insight into the Occitan movement at the present day, and the varying situations which led individuals to engage with it.

As already stated, much of the literature available in French dates from the period of greatest activity in the 1970s (and reviewed in Coulon 1978), and is the work of authors

actively engaged in the Occitan movement. Robert Lafont makes clear his position as historian engaged in the object of his study (Lafont 1974: 10), but as will be illustrated in Chapter Nine his work still represents his personal interpretation of events, which is not always accepted by others in the movement, and which, as in his dismissal in his recent works of the role of VVAP, appears occasionally to distort the facts. His extensive published works nevertheless are essential to an understanding of political Occitanism, both because of his role as de facto leader, and author of the theory of internal colonialism which acted as the theoretical underpinning of the movement. Other authors, such as Michel Le Bris ( Le Bris 1974, 1975), wrote in their capacity as militants, and make no pretence of objectivity. These provide source material which needs careful evaluation. Two more recent publications from within the movement attempt to bring up to date information about its evolution since the period of polemical publications in the 1970s.

‘Chemins d’Occitanie. Politique Occitane 1974-2000’ (Tautil 1997) consists of texts and documents relevant to the movement, selected for publication by Tautil, an activist who was involved in VVAP, became a key member of the Bureau Politique of the Partit Occitan, and has remained as its most prominent member in Provence. Significant documents such as the manifesto of VVAP are included, and articles relevant to the history of VVAP and the Partit Occitan by a number of activists. Many of these come from Occitania, the current review bearing this much used title being produced by the Partit Occitan. This compilation simplifies access to some key material. It highlights the issues which the activists themselves thought significant, and the image of themselves which they wish to present. Apart from a brief introduction by Alirol, the President of the Partit Occitan, and a short conclusion by Tautil, there is no attempt to provide an analysis or overview of the material presented. In discussing this book, Escartin, a former member of the Partit Occitan, criticized it as representing the views of the older generation of Occitanists, and argued that to be more representative it should have included examples of articles by members of the younger generation, like Domergue Sumien (and Escartin!) (Escartin interview 2004).

‘Un siècle d’occitanisme politique’ (Viaule 2003) is the publication of a text presented in 2002 by Viaule, the Partit Occitan’s most committed militant in the Tarn area, to a

conference of the federation of Régions et Peuples Solidaires, which represents the ethnic minorities of France. Viaule states that 'la brochure...n'est pas un ouvrage d'histoire...C'est le travail d'un militant'<sup>1</sup>, and goes on to point out that it was written rapidly, and without documentation, except that of Abrate's book <sup>2</sup> (Viaule 2003: back cover). Although it is easy to recognize statements which are clearly subjective, it is only by reference to other primary sources that it is possible to identify factual errors, for example concerning dates of organizations<sup>3</sup>. Although this is a useful publication, there is a danger that some of these errors will be perpetuated if, in the absence of a wide range of published sources on this subject, it is used uncritically. One existing example is the fact that Lavelle, who cites Viaule as a source, incorrectly states that Lutte Occitane was created in 1968 (Viaule 2003: 10 and Lavelle 2004: 532), and that Rouquette joined Lutte Occitane (Viaule 2003: 33 and Lavelle 2004: 532).

Reference should be made briefly to sources in Italian. 'Occitania', by Salvi (1998), is an updating of the information relevant to Occitania from his study of ten 'internal colonies of western Europe' (Salvi 1973). Active in the past in the Movimento Autonomista Occitan, Salvi provides information on the Occitan territory in Italy, but his survey of the political movement in France since the period of his earlier book is fragmentary and inaccurate in details. Academic overviews of French Occitania 1974-1986, and Italian Occitania since the early 1990s, are found in De La Pierre (1993 and 2000).

In conclusion, and to summarize, the existing academic literature relating to political Occitanism is limited in amount, and in the case of Anglo-Saxon examples tends to be related to the academic debate over theoretical issues explaining ethnic resurgence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is also notable for a failure to address the issue of Occitania as a whole, and often reveals a lack of understanding of the geographical and linguistic issues involved. On the other hand, much of the available information in French is not in the form of objective analysis. It is for this reason that a case is made out for the value of a

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<sup>1</sup> The brochure is not a historical work...it is the work of a militant.

<sup>2</sup> See above.

<sup>3</sup> These are identified in the body of the thesis.

micro-level study, which, by reference to primary source documents, makes possible an account of the evolution of the Occitan political movement, such as exists for other ethnoregionalist movements. This in turn enables an analysis to be carried out of the reasons for the difficulties which political Occitanism has experienced. The research design and methods for this qualitative study are described in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 2 Research design and research methods**

### **2.1 Introduction to the research process**

The research carried out was qualitative and interdisciplinary. It married theoretical concepts drawn from the social sciences with working procedures based primarily on the methods of the historian, to gather and evaluate empirical data. The research methods are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

A qualitative approach was adopted for a number of reasons. Firstly, the choice of a quantitative approach was likely to achieve little that would be meaningful. There is very little quantitative data applicable to this subject, unlike studies made of major or national political parties. Statistics are not directly available on membership numbers. There is little information in the form of election results. VVAP did not participate directly in the electoral environment, except in the case of some individuals who stood on lists of the left. The Partit Occitan, and to an even lesser extent other political groups, have participated in a limited way in local and regional elections, and a small number of legislative and European elections. Factors such as the contribution made to the programme of the Parti Socialiste by the Occitan regionalist and other French regionalist groups are not quantifiable. Evidence does not exist in the form of published surveys which apply to the whole of the Occitan territory, as it is not recognized as a territorial unit by the French government. (It did, however, prove possible to extrapolate information from existing surveys which applied to individual areas, and which when used in conjunction with each other helped to delineate the context within which the political groups operated, for example by giving information on the use of the Occitan language, or census figures to show regional population mobility.)

There were more positive reasons to choose a qualitative approach. As indicated in Chapter One, the aim of the study was to present a micro-level account of the evolution of political Occitanism, including an examination of the groups' own perceptions of their progress and problems. As Creswell states, the qualitative researcher 'gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants' (Creswell

1998: 14). Multiple forms of data are required, and in the case of political Occitanism the range of sources, internal bulletins, polemical publications, journals and some audiovisual materials make it possible to assess the viewpoint of those engaged in the political process (see below). Qualitative research is also 'interpretative research' (Creswell 1994: 147), and the second part of the study explores and analyzes the reasons for their lack of success. Above all, the aim was to provide a 'detailed view of the topic' 'where the close-up view does not exist' (Creswell 1998: 17), another characteristic of qualitative research.

Turning to Creswell again:

In a qualitative study, one does not begin with a theory to test or verify. Instead, consistent with the inductive model of thinking, a theory may emerge during the data collection and analysis phase... (Creswell 1994: 94)

He points out that as detailed information is gathered categories or themes emerge until a pattern may be observed (Creswell 1994: 95), and a 'tentative conceptual framework' is advanced, which 'explains... the main dimensions to be studied- the key factors, or variables' (Creswell 1994: 97). A 'conceptual framework' was established after the initial survey of the relevant documentation.

## **2.2 The establishment of the framework for the study**

The preliminary survey of primary sources relevant to the evolution of political Occitanism (see below 2.4) from 1974- 2000 confirmed that based on a number of criteria to assess the success of the political wing of an ethnoregionalist movement, Keating's conclusion that it had been a failure (Keating 1986) remains valid over the longer term. Although, as will be discussed in the body of the thesis, there is a case to be made for it having fulfilled the tribune function of getting some of its ideas placed on the agenda of national parties in France, and having made a contribution to the cultural wing's efforts to secure a rehabilitation of the regional language, it has failed to achieve its stated aims. Since the time of Keating's article, the creation of the Partit Occitan has meant that Occitanism has moved more directly into the electoral arena. As Rokkan and Urwin note, 'in a pluralist democracy, electoral competition and performance are the most obvious and impressive indicators of the ability to mobilize mass support' (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 128). The

failure to gain above 2% of the vote, except in a few isolated and specific cases, reflects the Occitanists' inability to mobilize such support.

In order to structure the investigation of the reasons for this failure to mobilize the population of Occitania in support of their policies, a framework was constructed, drawing on concepts developed in the social sciences. The purpose was to identify the variables which contribute to the likelihood of effective mobilization of a target audience for an ethnoregionalist movement. The framework was not designed to be definitive, nor hierarchical, as it is contended that the role of specific historical circumstances play a major role as vectors of change, a point which Medrano makes in relation to the evolution of the Basque and Catalan movements in Spain ( Medrano 1995). In the case of the Occitan movement, its initial politicization was linked to factors common to other French ethnoregionalist groups, including a response to the decolonization process, the Algerian war, and the events of May 1968. Its period of maximum mobilization was a response to factors specific to Occitania: the French government's decision to extend the military base on the Larzac plateau, and the economic crisis in viticulture in Languedoc (see Chapter 6). Bearing in mind these reservations, the variables were selected from a number of sources. Theoretical studies of the resurgence and development of ethnoregionalist movements in western Europe during the late 1960s and 1970s identified a number of variables which contribute to the possibility of minority ethnoregionalism developing within a state. It is not the intention to embark on academic debate on the respective merits of such theories, debate which has been extensively examined in existing literature, particularly as the focus of this study is more on the factors which have acted as countervailing forces to effective mobilization.

An examination of case studies of other ethnoregionalist movements, in particular the Corsican, Breton, Catalan and Basque movements (Loughlin 1987, Dupoirier 2001, Briquet 2002, Medrano 1995, Watson 1990, De Winter and Türsan 1998) made it possible to identify significant factors contributing to the mobilization and potential for success of such movements. The range of factors was such however that it confirmed the view that the specific historical and political context plays a major role in the potential for success, and so the decision was taken to cite them largely at appropriate points within the thesis, to act as points of comparison or contrast with the situation within Occitania. Criteria for



effective mobilization of a target population were derived from social movement theory (Klandermans and Tarrow 1988, Klandermans, Kriesi and Tarrow 1988, Duyvendak 1995, Tarrow 1998, Della Porta and Diani 1999, Appleton 2000). The analysis of regionalist parties in western Europe in De Winter and Türsan (1998) identified some of the internal and external determinants of success for such parties.

## **2.3 The conceptual framework**

### **2.3.1 Contributions to initial mobilization**

Most of the theories posited on the reasons for ethnic resurgence are macro-level. Political arguments see ethnic mobilization as a response to an over-centralized state, so that an 'element in bottom-up regionalism is the pressure for democratization and participation' (Keating 1997: 23). Economic arguments see it as a response to uneven development. For the purpose of this thesis, theories which link economic and political variables are most applicable, as even though they are challenged as explanations of general applicability they were perceived as being applicable to Occitania. The centre-periphery model of Rokkan and Urwin 'seeks to place ethnic variation in a general framework of geo-political location, economic strength and access to loci of decision making' (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 2). The internal colonialism theory of Lafont (Lafont 1967), and Hechter (1975) argues that the inhabitants of the periphery, as Keating notes, are given 'subordinate economic, social and political roles', which ultimately provokes territorial or ethnic mobilization in protest (Keating 1988: 12-13). Smith emphasizes the significance of the existence of a sense of cultural distinctiveness, which when allied to economic grievances act as a stimulus to a political movement (Smith 1981: 5).

### **2.3.2 Factors which can turn mobilization into effective mobilization**

Türsan states that 'ethnoregionalism is a mobilizational concept' (Türsan 1998: 5-6). The various theories which indicate circumstances which may provoke the emergence of ethnoregionalist sentiment within a region do not indicate the likelihood of that sentiment being turned into an effective political force. This implies the ability to voice specific demands as to the nature of the region's relationship with the central state, and to summon up sufficient support to enable enough pressure to be put on central government to secure those demands. What factors will reinforce ethnoregionalist sentiment? What factors will

enable sentiment to be turned into action? What form will the political organization take – pressure group or political party – and how will it function most effectively?

Firstly there must be a generally accepted definition of the geographical area which is the object of the activists' proposals. The more clearly defined the physical boundaries of the region, the easier it is to state the case for autonomy. This is apparent in the example of Corsica (Loughlin 1987: 134). Türsan reiterates 'the salience of the consciousness of group membership identity and the identification with some piece of territory' as 'the sine qua non' of ethnoregionalist parties (Türsan 1998: 5). What form may that 'group membership identity' take? It may take the form of 'shared histories and cultural / linguistic features different from that of the dominant culture of the nation-state' (Keating and Loughlin 1997: 3). This in fact summarizes the key features which emerged from the survey made of other ethnoregionalist and minority nationalist movements. The existence in a territory of a recognizable history as a political unit at some time in the past, a continuing association of its population with a specific culture, and the maintenance of, and pride in, a regional language all act as factors which increase the likelihood of success for an ethnoregional movement.

It has been pointed out that though nationalist or ethnoregionalist activists may tend to speak as though the population of the territory for which they seek independence or autonomy is homogeneous, this is not the case (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 152). It will be divided among a number of cleavages, for example class, political affiliation, religious beliefs, urban versus rural population, sociological differences such as level of education. An effective ethnoregionalist movement will secure the means of making its policies acceptable to as broad a section of the population as is possible. Some means must be found of creating a feeling of community of interests amongst these varying groups. Hooghe refers to the ability to create a social movement, which extends to larger social categories the commitment to territorial change which is normally confined to 'an active but limited group of people'. A social movement keeps alive what is described as a 'we-feeling' (Hooghe 1992: 34). The definition of a situation as being unjust contributes to the creation of this 'we-feeling'. Klandermans cites a number of authors who stress the significance of this issue (Klandermans 1988: 177).

A range of measures is required to create or consolidate a sense of collective identity by effective consciousness raising. These may include public speeches, slogans, banners, posters, plays, music, marches and demonstrations ( Klandermans 1988: 184). Such measures contribute to the dissemination of information, but the role of the mass media in creating consensus mobilization is identified as a critical factor (Klandermans 1988: 189). A movement's organizations must develop expertise in dealing with the mass media.

The nature of leadership is a significant factor. De Winter states that for ethnoregionalist parties the traditional historical paradigm of the 'single charismatic leader' may provide the most effective model, particularly in the early stages of its growth. He emphasizes the need for additional and differing characteristics as the party evolves (De Winter 1998: 22-23).

Effective mobilization of the potential audience is dependent also on the appropriate choice of organizational form, across the spectrum from clandestine terrorist group, pressure group to political party. Possible strategies to be employed are violence, peaceful protest or vote collection (Türsan 1998: 6). The question of whether terrorist groups employing violent methods are more or less likely to obtain some or all of their political agenda is a complex one. The evidence from European separatist and ethnoregionalist groups can only be assessed by reference to the individual national context, but it is a significant enough issue to merit examination as part of the investigation of the Occitan movement.

Any organizations which are established, whether the decision is made to act as a pressure group or a political party, must be able to secure adequate financing for their activities if they are to be effective. If group subscriptions are the main source of finance, this creates added pressure to mobilize supporters as active members, rather than mere sympathizers. The financial burden will be greater if a political party wishes to participate in the full range of electoral opportunities.

Finally, as any survey of ethnoregionalist movements in western Europe reveals, the strength and nature of the external political environment within which the ethnoregionalist group attempts to operate will affect the outcome, however effective the strategies employed by political groups.

Bidégaray states that ‘les réticences du public envers la revendication occitane dans le sud de la France expliquent les difficultés du mouvement, réduit à des scissions et des luttes internes’<sup>1</sup> (Bidégaray 1997: 21). The thesis examines the reasons for the failure to mobilize support within the population, and the way in which the political movement has evolved in spite of this failure.

## **2.4 The research methods**

As explained in 2.1, the research carried out was qualitative, and used the working methods of the historian to gather and evaluate empirical data. The approach rested mainly on the investigation and evaluation of documentary sources, although, as will be explained below, some audiovisual sources were used, and a small number of interviews carried out. The main field work was carried out at CIRDOC, the Centre Inter-Régional de Développement de l’Occitan, Béziers, Languedoc-Roussillon, which is the largest repository of documentation relevant to the Occitan language, culture, and political and social evolution. CIRDOC in 1999 replaced CIDO, the Centre International de Documentation Occitane, which was set up in 1975 by Occitan militants, including Yves Rouquette, to collect everything published in Occitan and associated with Occitan militancy. The fact that a visit had been made to CIDO in 1988 during a more limited research project<sup>2</sup> meant that it was possible to plan in advance the probable outline of the research, based on the sources likely to be available, and also facilitated accreditation and access to CIRDOC.

The documentary sources include internal bulletins of the various political groups associated with Occitanism, journals, newsletters and polemical publications by activists. The ones which were used are detailed in Appendix 3. In addition CIRDOC holds files of press cuttings relating to themes such as the viticulture protests and the Larzac crisis, and individuals such as Lafont and Rouquette. The library holds almost all the available material published in French and in Occitan relating to Occitanism, plus related themes such as other French minority groups, and theoretical studies of minority nationalism. Audiovisual sources include some archival material, recordings of television programmes

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<sup>1</sup> The reluctant attitude of the public towards Occitan claims in the south of France explains the difficulties of the movement, reduced to splits and internal struggles.

<sup>2</sup> Ritson 1988

relating to Occitanism, and a large collection of music, including the militant songs from the late 1960s and 1970s.

In addition to the sources available at CIRDOC, a longterm familiarity with the territory which constitutes Occitania within the French frontiers, and regular investigation of second hand bookshops prior to, and during, the research process, had made possible the acquisition of a personal collection of material relating to the Occitan movement.

At an early stage of the research process it was decided that it was necessary to develop the ability to read Occitan to gain access to militant documents, and to gain credibility when explaining the research project to others, particularly those actively involved in the movement. It indeed proved the case that at an early stage of every contact, this question was asked. Self study sources ( Equipe d'Animation Pédagogique de l'Académie de Toulouse 1993, Escartin 2000), dictionaries (Alibert 1997, Laux 2001, Lagarde 1996), plus the support of advice from staff at CIRDOC made this possible.

During the initial visit to CIRDOC a detailed survey of the catalogue was carried out, to identify the documentation which was relevant to the research programme. This was then categorized to prioritize the order of the investigation, to enable a systematic procedure. It was established that the key sources for this micro-level study were the internal bulletins of the political groups, Lutte Occitane, the Parti Nationaliste Occitan, and particularly of VVAP and the Partit Occitan. It was decided to focus the study on these two, as they provided the one consistent political strain which could claim to have an impact on the population throughout the period under review, in the case of VVAP by its activity during the Larzac crisis and the viticulture crisis, and the Partit Occitan by its participation in the electoral arena. The bulletins had the advantage that as they were not originally intended for a general audience they tended not to present an idealized image of their activity. One positive feature which emerged in terms of their contribution to this thesis was the fact that they included a high degree of self analysis of their problems and weaknesses, which made an initial critique of the movement possible. The reports from individual committees which appeared in the bulletins gave an insight to the kinds of activities carried out, and gave some indication of the numbers of militants involved. Certain problems were however identified with the choice of the internal bulletins as the core documentary source. Some in

the sequence were missing (and in the case of Entau País and CROC were not available). It was felt, however, that a sufficient number were available to make the project viable in conjunction with additional sources such as the organizations' newsletters and journals. In the bulletins from the 1970s to the mid 1980s the numbering system was idiosyncratic. Some were not numbered or clearly dated, the numbering system for the bulletins for VVAP was changed at intervals, and page numbers were not always inserted, or appeared random. Where problems existed it was usually possible to identify the dating from internal clues, and in the thesis sources of citations have been indicated as fully as possible.

An initial survey of the internal bulletins was made to create an outline chronology of key events, an indication of participants, and to identify significant themes which were common to, or specific to, the organizations. During subsequent visits a detailed reading of the bulletins was carried out. Individual bulletins were noted by date, and a summary was made of the key information contained. During the course of this reading, in addition, information relevant to the key themes previously identified was noted briefly under the appropriate headings, so that a filing system was established, and a system of cross-references.

The next stage of the field work was to extend the scope of the investigation by a detailed reading of the journals and newsletters of the political groups. The newsletters of individual committees proved a valuable source of information on activity and attitudes at the grassroots level during certain periods. 'Lo Faidit' (Paris) gave an input from those 'exiles' in Paris who in the early 1970s were committed to the Occitan cause. 'La Letra Occitanista' from the Aude area of Languedoc - Roussillon represented a particularly militant committee of the Partit Occitan. The most valuable was 'Lo Cebier', from Provence, which provided extensive source material relating to the problems specific to that area from 1990. The journals, which were aimed at a wider audience, often took a polemical stance, but provided a wide range of information on the issues which were given priority at different periods. 'Occitania VVAP' from 1978 – 1986 provided information on VVAP, and in 1987 became the bi-monthly journal of the Partit Occitan. The existence of the full sequence of these up to the current date meant that they were able to supplement the information from the internal bulletins, which was valuable where gaps existed in the

sequence of the latter. In the case of CROC, the journal, *Har/Far*, was the main source of information, in the absence of internal bulletins.

At this stage in the research the history and the evolution of the political groups was drafted. The next stage was to search where possible for alternative accounts of debates and events, to contribute to an assessment of the validity of the information gained. These took the form of information from rival groups, from dissenting participants, or in some cases from press reports which were inserted into bulletins or newsletters. Literature produced by divergent currents within the movement was also studied, to clarify different attitudes. 'Aici e Ara' (1979-1982) reflected the views of the more extreme nationalist current within VVAP. 'Amiras', a more academic journal of analysis from 1982 reflected the Lafont line. The published works of Lafont and Rouquette were studied.

An analysis of the organization, activities, and financing of the political groups made it possible to isolate the internal factors which contributed to their weakness. The approach then became thematic. To complement the study of the political organizations the cultural wing and the situation of the Occitan language during the period under review were investigated, using publications by the Institut d'Etudes Occitanes, and socio-linguistic studies of the use of Occitan since 1968.

The study of the political activity from 1974-2000 confirmed that Keating's statement of 1988 that 'Occitan regionalist agitation reached its peak in the mid 1970s under the impetus of the viticultural protest, the Larzac campaign and the cultural revival' (Keating 1988: 205-206) remained true. An investigation of the precise nature of the movements' involvement in the former two was made to establish that this level of support was due to the attachment of the political groups to a social movement, rather than because of a genuine surge of support for the wider political views of the Occitan movement. This case study of positive mobilization, the reasons for it, the methods employed, and its limitations, acted as an introduction to the further analysis of the factors, both internal and external, which subsequently meant that such levels of mobilization were not maintained. The conceptual framework outlined in 2.3.2 was employed to structure the investigation into geographical, demographic, historical and linguistic factors, leadership style and

mobilization methods which impacted on the potential for success for the Occitan political movement.

The research was designed as a documentary and textual study, but this was supplemented by some audiovisual material which was accessible at CIRDOC, and by semi-structured interviews of a small number of individuals who were associated with the Occitan political movement in different capacities. These were carried out at a late stage of the research process, so that the maximum benefit could be gained from limited periods of access. The purpose of the interviews was to enable different perspectives of the movement to be gained from 'insiders', and this influenced the choice of subjects. It was recognized in advance that this type of interview will to some extent reflect the agenda of the interviewee, might not necessarily be a source of specific factual information being sought, but could illuminate attitudes and divergences of perceptions. The choice of a semi-structured approach enabled many questions to be open-ended, leaving the interviewees free to develop their own line of response in a narrative style, which provided evidence of their preoccupations and personalities. At the same time it was possible to guide the line of inquiry with specific questions to elicit information about certain key issues. In each case a period of informal discussion on a previous occasion was followed by an interview lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. The interviews were recorded, later transcribed, and information from them was incorporated where relevant to elucidate or extend the documentary data. Robert Lafont and Yves Rouquette were the two key interpreters of political Occitanism of the 1960s and 1970s, in effect the *élite*. By interviewing them it was possible to gain evidence additional to that obtainable from published sources, and to elicit their evaluation of the state of the movement since their active involvement ceased. René and Annie Zerby represented 'grass roots' activists of the 1970s, whose political engagement had evolved into a commitment to the cultural wing of the movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Jordi Escartin in effect provided a case study of a member of the younger generation of Occitanists, active in both the cultural and political spheres. In the former capacity he is the author of a best-selling manual of Occitan. His commitment extends to the decision to bring his children up with Occitan as their first language. As a member of the Partit Occitan from its inception until his resignation in 1998, he rose to become a member of its Bureau National, and represented the party in cantonal, municipal and legislative elections. As well as acting as an interview subject, Escartin gave access to the



meticulously organized documentation of his political career. He also invited contact with his family, to observe the issue of bilingualism in practice. All the interviewees gave permission to be cited in the thesis.

## **2.5 Problems associated with the methodology**

In his thesis on the contemporary Occitan political movement presented in 1976, Formaggio outlined some of the difficulties which he had experienced. ‘Entreprendre des recherches sur le mouvement politique occitan, c’est tout d’abord se heurter à un très gros problème de collecte de données’<sup>1</sup>. Most of the the Occitan publications were those of committed Occitanists, and thus subjective and polemical (Formaggio 1976: 41). There was a lack of surveys and polls which would allow one to measure with precision the image of the movement as seen by the Occitanists themselves, the population living in Occitania, and the hexagonal public in general. Only a few press analyses were available. Because of the lack of scientific studies of the organization most of the information had to come from documents produced by the different groups, which were inevitably partial (Formaggio 1976: 44). By cross-referencing, and confronting contradictory facts, it was nevertheless possible to get at the reality of the situation (Formaggio 1976: 45). Although researchers now have the advantage of the accumulation of the relevant documentation at CIRDOC, the problems remain broadly the same, and the means of addressing them similar. Bias has to be recognized, and the overall picture has to be built up by attention to detail in the various sources, and by the system of cross-referencing referred to by Formaggio.

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<sup>1</sup> Undertaking research on the Occitan political movement, means first of all coming up against a very large problem of the collection of data.

## **Chapter 3 The context**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to place the research in its political and historical context. Firstly a brief summary is provided of the key aspects of the French political system relevant to the efforts of ethnoregionalist movements in France during the period under review. Secondly, an outline of Occitanist regionalist activity is provided, from its origins in the nineteenth century until 1974, the starting point of the current research project, to make it possible to place the post 1974 Occitan political organizations on the continuum of Occitanist activity. Significant trends are indicated, and the interplay of cultural and political activity at different periods noted. A subsidiary aim is to give some indication of the nature of the involvement of Robert Lafont and Yves Rouquette in the movement prior to 1974, in order to trace their growing influence, and to understand the ideological conflict which developed between them in the 1970s. The account is based mainly on Abrate's study of the movement (Abrate 2001), which is now recognized as the fullest and most objective account of Occitanism up to 1968.

### **3.2 The French political system**

The evolution of the Occitan ethnoregionalist movement has to be seen in the context of the French political and administrative system within which it operated, a system which has been consistently unsympathetic towards movements seeking greater autonomy for territory within its borders. The French state has traditionally been described as a centralized one, with the Fifth Republic inheriting aspects of administrative control from the system evolved by the Jacobins at the time of the French Revolution, and subsequently from the Napoleonic system (Mazey 1991: 152). The first article of the Republican Constitution of 1793 declared that 'la France est une et indivisible', and this insistence on the singularity of the French Republic has continued in all later constitutions. It is this premise which has subsequently influenced the nature of centre-periphery relationships in France. As Cole states:

The emergence of a strong central state during the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods was accompanied by a gradual but ruthless suppression of all linguistic and

regional identities; the progress of the idea of nation thus became largely synonymous with that of the state itself. (Cole 1998: 6)

Claims by regional minorities to a greater degree of autonomy have come up against this Jacobin model of the centralized state, designed to establish control, uniformity, and equality. It is true that views on the extent of the stranglehold of the central administration, before the decentralization reforms of the 1980s, were challenged in the 1970s and 1980s by a number of academic studies, made for example by Crozier, Grémion, Thoenig, and Worms, who argued that the practice was different from the texts of the legislation, and infinitely more flexible. The system worked as a series of accommodations between elected representatives and state administrators, analyzed in terms of ‘complicité’ by Worms, or as functioning by virtue of ‘régulation croisée’ or honeycomb structure by Theonig (Mazey 1991: 155-157). It was also the case that by the 1970s in France, as in Italy, governments, while ‘reluctant to concede power, in some cases could see the logic of decentralization as a strategy to enhance functional efficiency and to diminish the administrative and political burden on the centralized state’ (Keating 1998: 59). In the latter case the basic concept of ‘la France une et indivisible’ was not challenged – on the contrary, ‘where national unity was threatened by regionalist agitation it could conciliate local feeling and help accommodate distinctive territory into the national community’ (Keating 1998: 59).

The Defferre decentralization legislation, carried out by a socialist government between 1982 and 1986, did indeed have the effect of ‘sterilizing’ a certain amount of potential regionalist activity, and contributed to a decline in support for the Occitan movement (see Chapter 8.2). Although the reforms were not as ambitious as some had hoped, they ‘shattered’ the ‘prefect-centred, State-dominated system’ (Levy 2001: 93)<sup>1</sup>. The Préfets lost their position as executive of the départements. Their power of ‘tutelle a priori’, which gave them the right to impede the decisions of a departmental council was replaced by the ‘tutelle a posteriori’, the more limited right to challenge, before an administrative court, the decision of a council after it has been taken (Elgie and Griggs 2000: 77). The administrative regions of France were ‘elevated to the status of territorial government’

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed analysis of all the reforms, widely available in academic literature, is not carried out here.

(Levy 2001: 93), and from 1986 Regional Councils were elected by universal suffrage, and acquired a wide range of responsibilities. The measures introduced were sufficient to satisfy some of those who during the 1970s had campaigned for greater freedom for the periphery. As Elgie and Griggs note, however, though these reforms 'redefined the powers of local government,' they 'maintained a unitary system of government' (Elgie and Griggs 2000: 74), and it has been stated that 'the democratisation of public action, which was one of the major aims of decentralization, is undoubtedly one of the most underrealised dimensions of the process' (Négrier 2000: 130). Even as further decentralization measures have been proposed, for example by the Raffarin government in 2002, this has not changed a fundamental belief on the part of many political figures that they should not be such as to threaten 'the one and indivisible nature of the republic', so that as a result 'centralization is still very present in the minds of key political actors as a response to the fear of territorial and/or cultural fragmentation' (Elgie 2003: 236). The strong reaction to the Jospin government's proposals for Corsica in 2001, which were 'undermined by reactions from the Council of State' (Le Galès 2005: 130-131), provides an illustration of this.

Another aspect of the political environment which has reduced the potential for regionalist groups to put pressure on the state is the electoral system, which though subject to periodic changes of details, and variations depending on the type of election, has remained broadly a two-round majoritarian system. This is recognized as over-representing large parties and under-representing small parties and those which either on ethical or practical grounds are not players in the alliance mongering which is a feature of French politics (Elgie 2003: 160). This general principle has a particular impact on ethnoregionalist parties. Although, as De Winter points out, the evidence is not conclusive, it is generally accepted that majoritarian electoral procedures tend to penalize ethnoregionalist parties, as their sympathizers may not vote for them as the likelihood of gaining seats is limited. In Belgium, Spain, and Italy (to 1994), a proportional representation system with low thresholds is considered to be a factor in the breakthrough and achievement of parliamentary representation by ethnoregionalist parties (De Winter 1998: 219). It is true that in France proportional representation is used for the European elections, and from 1986 until 2004 was employed for regional elections. In the former case, the fact that the whole of France acts as one large constituency, with a five per cent threshold, is

unfavourable for ethnoregionalist parties. Although the regional elections might appear to have the most potential for success for such parties, in France they are regarded as ‘second order’ elections, with a high degree of abstention, and also tend to be dominated by national issues (Schrijver 2004: 192-193). The two round system with a high first round threshold of ten per cent, introduced for the 2004 elections, was designed to limit the likelihood of extremist parties, particularly the Front National, being able to act as ‘power brokers’ in the fragmented situation created by proportional representation (Elgie 2003: 233). It also, however, limits the potential for other minority parties, such as ethnoregionalist ones, to gain influence.

All ethnoregionalist or separatist groups in France are thus operating within this ideologically and practically hostile political environment. In order to understand fully the particular response of the Occitan regionalist movement to the political situation during the period of the current study, it is necessary to trace its earlier evolution and response to changing historical circumstances.

### **3.3 Occitan regionalist activity from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century until 1974**

#### **3.3.1 The Félibrige**

The renaissance of Occitan awareness in an organised form begins with the establishment in 1854 of the Félibrige, an association of Provençal poets which aimed to defend the langue d’oc. Its influence spread to other areas of Occitania, and Frédéric Mistral, its initiator, became known nationally, receiving the Nobel prize for literature in 1904, for a body of work written in the Occitan of Provence (Nouvel 1977: 105). Ironically this success came at a time when the educational policy of the French State was aimed at securing the annihilation of regional languages such as Occitan, Breton and Basque. The influence of the Félibrige was weakened by a number of factors. Internal dissensions developed over the written form of the language, with divisions between the supporters of Provençal, Languedocian and North Occitan. This problem served as a catalyst, exacerbating personal quarrels linked to different concepts of Occitania, its culture and its future (Abrate 2001: 28). The fact that the statutes of the Félibrige prohibited political and

religious discussion weakened its effectiveness in combating the State's linguistic policy (Abrate 2001: 43). Abrate stresses a fact that was to become a recurring theme in the subsequent history of Occitan regionalist activity. Efforts to stimulate interest in an Occitan renewal rarely came from the general population of the area, but rather from a small group. Spontaneous pressure from below only occurred when certain events vital to the future of a region led to a resurgence of 'patriotic Occitan sentiment,' for example during the 1907 revolt of the wine producers of Languedoc or the Decazeville miners' strike of 1961-62 (Abrate 2001: 45). Although supposedly apolitical, the Félibrige did have an ideology, which was mainly that of Mistral. Between 1860 and 1870 he developed federalist ideas, partly under the influence of the links between the Félibréens and the Catalans, who were experiencing a cultural renaissance which developed political content (Keating 1988: 69). The aspects of language and history common to Catalonia and Occitania which had existed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were emphasised. Lafont points out that Mistral never had an explicitly political analysis, but that it is possible to find a frequently expressed sympathy for both cultural and administrative decentralization in public speeches which he made and in private correspondence (Lafont 1974: 149-150). Abrate concludes that Mistral never envisaged, even in the long term, the independence of Occitania (Abrate 2001: 77).

After 1870 Mistral moved towards the right, partly as a result of the fear created by the Commune, and hostility towards the Third Republic (Abrate 2001: 78). A left wing group within the Félibrige became "albigéist", emphasising the atrocities committed during the Albigensian Crusade in the thirteenth century, to promote a desire for 'revenge' against the imposition of centralized control (Abrate 2001: 81). Conflict existed between republicans and monarchists within the Félibrige, and between 1880 and 1890 Mistral tried to focus on defence of the language in order to secure the unity of the group (Abrate 2001: 83). In 1892 an attempt was made to move the Félibrige into the political arena by Amouretti and Maurras, who denounced the cul de sac into which the narrow culturalism of the Félibrige had led. A programme was outlined which bears comparison with the demands made by some Occitanist activists in the 1970s. They sought freedom of the communes, the suppression of départements, and the restoration of the old provinces with a sovereign assembly at Bordeaux, Toulouse, Montpellier, Marseille and Aix. These were to be

autonomous, with control over the administration of justice, education and public works. They demanded in addition the economic development of Occitan territory. Subsequently federalism became increasingly associated with the right wing (Abrate 2001: 84-85).

At the beginning of the twentieth century the image of the Félibrige was one of archaism and lack of action. Social events such as banquets attended by the social élite of Provence replaced intellectual endeavour. However as the influence of Provence declined, some other areas became more militant.

Any discussion of the commitment to political change of the Félibrige in the early twentieth century must focus on its reaction to the 1907 revolt of the wine producers of Languedoc. According to Abrate (Abrate 2001: 101) several attitudes co-existed, determined by the distance of the members from Languedoc, the wide variety of political beliefs within the association, and the ambiguous nature of the leadership's response to the events. There was no apparent condemnation of the wine producers, but neither did they take the opportunity to give active support. Abrate disputes the argument of Lafont that it is only in retrospect in the 1970s that an Occitanist complexion was placed on this revolt. He produces evidence from contemporary sources (Abrate 2001: 102 and footnotes p.113) to support the view that some of the Félibrige leaders, for example the President Devoluy, believed that by their joint action the wine producers were consciously acting against Parisian politics and defending their territory. The failure of the Félibrige to turn this situation to their advantage is seen as mainly the responsibility of Mistral, who refused repeated requests to take a lead in the demonstrations. 1907 is seen as a turning point in the history of the Félibrige. Abrate argues that the main beneficiary were the socialists, who furthered their hold in Languedoc, while the Félibrige became increasingly associated with the right, and therefore more estranged from the local population (Abrate 2001: 104-105).

1907-1914 marked a period of further decline. Continuing internal differences, for example over the written form of the language and rivalries between different areas, were made worse by political, ideological, and religious cleavages common to France as a whole, notably republicanism versus monarchy, and anticlericalism versus clericalism (Abrate 2001: 44). The only common point was the desire to defend the Occitan language.

Increasingly the influence of Maurras, by then leader of the extreme right wing Action Française, moved the Félibrige in an aristocratic and anti-democratic direction. The association with Action Française was to damn Occitanist organisations in the eyes of many in the future. The death of Mistral in March 1914 was a loss for the Félibrige, which declined further during the First World War, which produced an outbreak of pro-French patriotism.

### **3.3.2 The 1920s and 1930s**

At the end of the war, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France renewed the issue of provincial autonomy. Alsace-Lorraine pressed for specific rights within the French State, and there was considerable regionalist agitation in Brittany. The Occitanists began to take much more interest in what was happening to other minority groups, and in particular the period 1920-1930 saw a reinforcement of the influence of Catalonia, which had since 1914 acquired a greater degree of administrative autonomy (Abrate 2001: 162-163). The Félibrige seemed archaic and irrelevant. The post-war generation wanted change, and proposals were made to open up the movement to deal with the social and economic reality of Occitania. Some began to envisage the idea of autonomy (Abrate 2001: 163). A Comité d'Action des Revendications Nationales du Midi demanded the status of a national language for Occitan, and a wide ranging programme of decentralization to give greater political and economic autonomy (Abrate 2001: 165-169). La Ligue de la Patrie Méridionale-Fédération des Pays d'Oc, set up in 1923, is described by Abrate as a significant landmark in the transition from the Occitanism of the Félibrige to modern Occitanism (Abrate 2001: 171). The arguments in some of the unpublished tracts which he cites foreshadow those advanced in the theory of internal colonialism in the 1960s and 1970s. Paris, the Paris region, and the large Parisian firms are accused of benefiting from the domination they imposed on the provinces (Abrate 2001: 173), and so the league argued in favour of a federal reform (Abrate 2001: 177). Although the league's practical results were minimal, it profoundly influenced the ideas of the generation of the 1920s.

During the 1930s Occitanism became more combative and radical. France was politically unstable, with a marked right/left bipolarisation. Economic depression accentuated the



political problems. In this atmosphere the minorities in Alsace and Brittany began to increase their demands (Abrate 2001: 214). As Catalonia secured its Statute of Autonomy in 1932, the Occitanists also were influenced to develop their political theory. Camproux evolved a sophisticated argument in favour of a form of federalism which was clearly distinguished from the monarchist federalist ideas of Action Française, in that it was 'progressist', influenced by leftist ideals, and conceived in a European context (Abrate 2001: 224-233). The journal *Occitania*, first published in 1924, encouraged an intellectual renaissance which was not just literary, but which encouraged socio-economic analysis. Abrate quotes *Occitania*, May 1936 "sem un poble colonizat" – 'we are a colonized people' (Abrate 2001: 285). It was argued that the economic marginalisation of Occitania by a state under the influence of capitalism resulted in poverty and exile. The alteration and loss of the language deprived Occitania of its proper identity and placed it in a position of inferiority and psychological alienation. While acknowledging that the association with colonization would have different resonances in the 1930s than in the 1960s during the period of decolonization, Abrate insists on the resolutely modernist dimensions of the debate during this period, and the fact that the *Félibrige* had by 1939 become an anachronism in the eyes of other Occitanists (Abrate 2001: 285-287). There was a significant event in the cultural field during this period. The *Societas d'Estudis Occitans* in 1936 adopted Louis Alibert's method for the normalisation of the written language. Capable of adaptation to the main dialectical groups of the Occitan language, it was to play an important role in efforts to revitalise the language (Lafont 1974: 206).

### **3.3.3 The second World War**

The progression to a more overtly political concept of Occitania was halted by the Second World War. Occitanists' reactions were on the whole the same as in 1914 in that patriotism to the French State became the priority. After the military defeat by Germany, in June 1940 Marshall Pétain became President of unoccupied France, which corresponded fairly closely to the territories which comprised Occitania. Pétain was welcomed initially by Occitanists, particularly as Pétainist policy advocated regionalism in the form of the restoration of the administrative significance of the old provinces. A circular from the Secretary of State for Education and Youth supported the teaching of local history and geography and encouraged

teachers to learn the langue d'oc. Within the Vichy government a number of posts were held by people who had links with the Occitan movement. These circumstances led to a reinvigoration of the Félibrige, particularly the formerly marginalised right wing and antidemocratic faction (Abrate 2001: 324-328). As the Vichy régime evolved, it became less acceptable to some in the movement, including Lafont, but Abrate concludes that on the whole the Occitan movement stayed in appearance loyal to the régime, or at least accepted the status quo. While drawing attention to the sensitive nature of the question of collaboration and resistance during World War Two, and the problems associated with the interpretation of limited sources, he concludes that the active role played by Occitanists in the Resistance was very limited (Abrate 2001: 353).

### **3.3.4 1945 – 1968**

Post-war Occitanism until the early 1960s was coloured by the responses of Occitanism to the Vichy régime. The Félibrige had a collaborationist image in the eyes of many. The association of the Vichy régime with regionalism and the teaching of regional languages meant that such policies became suspect at the liberation of France (Abrate 2001: 354). In April 1945 a new Occitanist organisation was established. The Institut d'Etudes Occitanes (IEO) became the only organisation of significance until the 1960s. It was seen as an opportunity to efface the past. In its efforts to make a fresh start the IEO broke not only with the wartime collaborationist image, but also distanced itself from many of the more dynamic aspects of Occitanism in the 1930s, by deliberately seeking to avoid an overtly political stance (Abrate 2001: 362). The strength of post-war French patriotism lessened the appeal of federalist ideas, and aspirations were more towards decentralization than a restructuring of France. Robert Lafont emerges as a central player at this point. He, like many of the new generation of Occitanists, was versed in Marxist ideology. Nationalism for him meant French nationalism, and he opposed any Occitan nationalism which could lead to separatist ideas<sup>1</sup>. Complex and often subtle differences of interpretation of political ambitions existed between members of the IEO, which provided another motive to focus on cultural aspirations on which they were agreed (Abrate 2001: 403).

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<sup>1</sup> His ideas are discussed more fully in Chapter 9.2

In 1951 the Loi Deixonne was passed, as a result partly of pressure on the government from Breton and Occitan activists. Lafont describes it as providing mainly moral advantages (Lafont 1974: 227). It put an end to the repression of regional languages within the state school system, and made official the term the Occitan language, ending its description as a patois. Its practical results were restricted by the fact that it provided for regional languages to be taught outside the regular timetables of staff and pupils, and made no provision for the training of teachers of regional languages. As a response to this problem the IEO in 1951 set up an education section to provide guidance and training for teachers of Occitan (Abrate 2001: 411). Most of the members of the IEO were writers, so literary output was seen as a vital element affirming the existence of Occitania, but in addition some began to examine aspects of Occitan life, applying social science methods (Abrate 2001: 435-437).

A significant development in the orientation of the IEO occurred in 1954 when Lafont published in the *Annales* of the IEO (no.7 January) an article arguing for the need to place the movement's cultural action in its geographic and economic context, and to promote regionalist activity (Abrate 2001: 460). This provoked internal debate. The new version of the review *Occitania*, first published in 1956, developed Lafont's ideas further, discussing economic under-development of the region, rural depopulation, and even 'le droit de vivre au pays'<sup>1</sup> which was to become the leitmotif of the 1970s. Lafont's analysis differed from that of some other Occitanists in that he blamed not only the impact of political centralization, but also the effects of the capitalist system (Abrate 2001: 471).

From 1959 to 1968 external factors such as the decolonization process, the Algerian war, the economic modernisation of France and the construction of Europe forced a reconsideration of the objectives of those committed to Occitanism. One strand led to the nationalism of François Fontan, and the Parti Nationaliste Occitan, established in 1959. The other led to the regionalism of the Comité Occitan d'Etudes et d'Action (COEA). Fontan was a complex character who had espoused monarchism, anarchism, trotskyism and the new left, before finally developing his nationalist, separatist thesis. He evolved a theory

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<sup>1</sup> The right to live in your own area.

of 'ethnisme'. Ethnic differentiation was seen as a fundamental fact of the human condition, and language was regarded as crucial to that differentiation. This led him to advocate a policy of "re-occitanisation" of Occitan society, which was condemned at the time as racist, and which evokes echoes of Le Pen's later ideology. Immigrants into Occitania would be allowed to stay, but without political rights, or return to their 'own country' where Occitanists could help them in liberation movements (Lo Lugar sup.no.5, cited by Abrate p.542). It should be emphasised that 'their own country' here refers to other areas of metropolitan France as well as overseas territories. Politically he aimed at an Occitan State with elected regional assemblies, and regional executives with extensive powers. His policies came to advocate some aspects of Marxist thought. Expelled from the IEO, and strongly criticised by Lafont, he nevertheless exerted influence over some members. Yves Rouquette was for a while tempted by the separatist ideas of the PNO (Abrate 2001: 495). Although it never had more than a few members, the PNO is significant as an attempt to move the Occitanist movement explicitly into the political arena, with an extremist ideology. Its role is further discussed in Chapter 4.4.2.

Those of more moderate views within the IEO who wished to politicise their action left in 1962 to form the COEA. Robert Lafont resigned from the Presidency of the IEO to become the Secretary General of what was initially a form of 'think tank', and which defined itself in 1963 as a pressure group aiming to influence the organised left. Yves Rouquette was also a founder member. ( In 1965 Lafont and Rouquette together founded the journal *Viure*, which provided a forum for the debate of political and cultural ideas.) The catalyst which led to the formation of the COEA was the Decazeville miners' strike of December 1961-February 1962, and the regionalist support which became associated with it. During this strike Serge Mallet wrote an article for *France Observateur* in which he referred to 'les colonisés de l'intérieur', and the theme of internal colonialism was subsequently developed in detail by Robert Lafont in 'La révolution régionaliste' (1967), and adopted by other militants. Lafont argued that Occitania had been dispossessed of control of its agricultural and industrial wealth by the power of a centralized state, in conjunction with capitalism, exploiting its periphery. Examples which were cited, and which subsequently became key components of the polemical literature of the Occitan movement during the 1970s, included a critique of the effect of the tourist development of

the coastline of Languedoc, and the impact of the development of the industrial site of Fos. Lafont's response was to argue in favour of regionalism within the context of a socialist French State ( Abrate 2001: 520). During 1966 and 1967 the COEA took part in socialist gatherings in various French towns to discuss the 1966 report of M.Rocard, 'Décoloniser la France'. Yves Rouquette appears more prominently at this stage, whether clashing with Rocard over the interpretation of the term colonialism at a public meeting (Lafont 1974: 287) or emerging as the leader of a rival group to Lafont's within the COEA. Although not overtly hostile to Lafont at this point, Rouquette hoped to radicalise Lafont's thought.

### **3.3.5 An outline of Occitan political activity between 1968 and 1974**

May 1968 marks the beginning of the modern era of Occitanism. According to Formaggio, 'le combat devient un combat de reconquête comme si l'on voulait reconstruire une société occitane disparue'<sup>1</sup> (Formaggio 1976: 75). Lafont states that May 1968 was significant as it marked 'le passage à l'action publique'<sup>2</sup> (Lafont interview November 2003). After the social and political upheaval of this period ideas which had found favour with the young, such as 'gauchisme', a support for the extreme left, anarchism, and support for the ecology movement, were integrated into Occitanist analyses. Increased radicalism in Brittany, Corsica and the Basque country helped to stimulate regional awareness in Occitania. General De Gaulle's announcement in 1969 of a referendum on a number of measures, including regionalisation, contributed to the debate. Lafont writes of the arrival of a new generation of militants, who were no longer willing to separate the cultural from political engagement. Literary output expressed political aims. Yves Rouquette and his brother, the priest known as Jean Larzac, dominated this poetic output. There was an outburst of Occitan musicians, whose militant songs were used as a means of raising political awareness (Lafont 1974: 297-298). From this increased radicalisation the group Lutte Occitane emerged, superceding and drawing its membership from the COEA, and incorporating members of the Comités d'Action Occitans set up in 1968, and which represented a wide range of the revolutionary left. (Some members of the COEA including

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<sup>1</sup> The struggle became one of reconquest, as though they wanted to rebuild a vanished Occitan society.

<sup>2</sup> The transition to public action.

Yves Rouquette did not join. Robert Lafont did.) Lutte Occitane became the most important Occitan political group until the creation of VVAP in 1974 (Formaggio 1976: 138). It is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.4.3, but its most significant aspect was its view that Occitania was above all a victim of capitalism, and the conflict was perceived in class terms, with the Occitans considered to be victims of the hegemony of the French bourgeoisie (Touraine 1981a: 270-271). Between 1971 and 1973 Lutte Occitane began to draw back from its more extremist ideas, and at the same time the Parisian gauchists who had made Occitanism fashionable for a while began to be more critical of it (Lafont 1974: 309). Lutte Occitane involved itself in the protests against the expansion of the military camp on the Larzac plateau in the Aveyron, and offered support to the Languedocian wine producers. Militant activity during this period gave a public profile to Occitanism which it had never possessed in the past, although debate exists over the level of Occitanist commitment among the local populations being thus supported. These issues are discussed in Chapters 6.4. and 6.5.

Lafont completed 'La revendication occitane' in March 1974 shortly before the death of President Pompidou in April created the circumstances in which he attempted to stand as a presidential candidate representing the minorities of France. His conclusion (Lafont 1974: 310-315) to the book therefore provides a useful insight into the state of the movement as it appeared to a protagonist at the moment where the current research programme begins. Lafont argued that since 1970 the cultural aspects of the movement had enjoyed considerable success. The publication and sale of books written in the langue d'oc had increased, large numbers of teachers attended training sessions in the language, and public awareness had been heightened by militant songs, increased exposure on the radio and television and slogans on the walls of Occitania. In his analysis of the political situation Lafont claimed that Lutte Occitane had succeeded in terms of recruitment and public credibility, (a statement which the accounts of other authors challenge - see Chapter 4.4.3), but it still had to face competition from other minor Occitanist groups, including the PNO. Lafont himself made the point that it was often difficult to differentiate clearly between the groups. (As well as the PNO and Lutte Occitane there were a number of shortlived groups, with few members, such as the Fédération Anarchiste Communiste d'Occitanie, the Parti Socialiste Occitan, and Poble d'Oc). Their texts reveal a mixture of political influences,

plus borrowings from the feminist and youth movements. He felt that a danger existed that in the future the Occitan situation could create a fascist movement rather than a genuinely revolutionary one (by which Lafont means a socialist one), but the general tenor of his conclusion was positive. In a statement which highlights the distance covered from the origins of the Occitan movement in the culturalism of the apolitical Félibrige, he claimed that 'il est difficile désormais de se dire occitaniste sans mettre en question à la fois la forme de l'Etat français et le régime socio-économique' <sup>1</sup> (Lafont 1974: 313).

### **3.4 Conclusion: the situation in 1974**

On the positive side, the period 1968-1974 marks the period during which the cultural and political wings of the Occitan movement were most closely allied. Benefiting from the ambiance created by the events of May 1968, the move towards a militant form of poetry and song to engage the Occitan population, which had begun with the publication of *Viure* in 1965, was taken further into the public arena. 'Révolution, occitanisme et poésie sont sentis comme une même chose'<sup>2</sup> (Rouanet 1971: 17). Rouquette recalls that the words of his poems were graffitied on the walls of the university in Toulouse during the events of May 1968 (Rouquette interview September 2002). The militant song production (see Chapter 10.5.3) 'met l'Occitan sur la place publique comme il n'a jamais été, elle nourrit ensuite la revendication, suscite le débat'<sup>3</sup> (Bruand and Gachet 1980: 337). The book 'Occitanie. Volem viure' by the militant Michel le Bris, which was published in 1974, catalogues the issues with which the Occitanists had engaged. Support for the viticulteurs of Languedoc, the agricultural workers whose land was under threat in the Larzac, and industrial workers whose jobs were at risk, and criticism of the effects of the 'touristification' of Occitan territory, were underpinned by the internal colonialism arguments put forward by Lafont (Le Bris 1974). The cover of the book links the Occitans with the Bretons, Basques, Catalans, Corsicans and Alsations as part of a movement cracking the supposedly eternal image of the one and indivisible France, and states that it is

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<sup>1</sup> From now on it will be difficult to call one self an Occitanist without challenging the form of the French state and the social and economic system.

<sup>2</sup> Revolution, Occitanism and poetry were felt to be one and the same thing.

<sup>3</sup> Puts Occitan before the public as never before, encourages protest, stirs debate.

not just a handful of perverse or nostalgic intellectuals, but workers, peasants, small tradesmen, young people, 'en masse'. There is evidence at this period of a level of public awareness of Occitanism which had never previously existed. The Fête of Lutte Occitane at Montségur in June 1973 was attended by six thousand people from all over Occitania (Formaggio 1976: 138). Three thousand, from all over France, were present at the Fêtes Ouvertes event on the Larzac plateau in the same year (Le Bris 1974: 351).

Lafont was recognized not just as the de facto leader of the Occitan movement, but as a stimulus to consciousness-raising within other regional minorities, and to debate on this issue within the hexagonal left (Bruand and Gachet 1980: 333). Loughlin has indicated that left-wing radical regionalists in Corsica explicitly adopted the framework of internal colonialism from the Occitan regionalist movement (Loughlin 1987: 251). Lafont gained national notoriety when he was persuaded to stand as the candidate representing the minorities of France in the 1974 presidential election, and his candidature was invalidated at the last moment, in circumstances which remained controversial, by the Conseil Constitutionnel, which as part of its responsibilities checks on the legality of electoral procedures. Although it was alleged that eighteen of the one hundred and fourteen signatures which supported his candidature were invalid, having been given to other candidates, it was rumoured that the real reason was that 'il s'agissait d'une annulation pour atteinte à l'intégrité du territoire'<sup>1</sup> (Formaggio 1976: 213). The resentment felt in regionalist circles contributed to the circumstances which led to the creation of Volem Viure al País (see Chapter 4.2).

The comparatively high public profile of Occitanism at this period meant that there could be some expectation on the part of militants that they might move forward to achieve some of their aims. There were however a number of countervailing negative factors already present. Fragmentation and factionalism are seen as frequent problems of ethnoregionalist movements. In the context of ethnoregionalist parties De Winter summarizes the types of factionalism as being firstly, strategic and tactical, with differences of opinion over how extreme should be nationalistic objectives, and what methods should be adopted. Secondly,

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<sup>1</sup> It was a question of invalidation on the grounds of a threat to the integrity of the territory.



ideological issues exist, particularly over left-right commitment. Thirdly, issues of leadership competition can promote factionalism (De Winter 1998: 228). All of these potential sources of cleavage existed within the Occitan movement by 1974. A cartoon from *L'Echo des Corbières*, the journal of the Languedocian viticulteurs, expresses as well as any political analysis the reality behind the public profile of Occitanism in the post 1968 environment. A customs officer, on the frontier between France and Occitania, represents the nationalist Occitanist. The anarchist faction is represented by an individual writing graffiti insulting the police. The traditionalists, members of the *Félibrige*, are represented by a man in regional costume praying to 'Saint Mistral'. The right-wing is represented by a jackbooted figure with a placard saying 'we don't want any more Arabs in Occitania'. The maoist Occitanist is seen as a rather self-satisfied looking young man walking from Paris to the provinces, bearing a book entitled 'evangelization of the Papuans', an image which indicates the resentment felt by some of the Occitan population towards the arrogant attitude of some of the gauchist elements at that period. The communist Occitanist is demanding retirement at fifty-nine. Finally, a skeleton represents the wine producers of the Pays d'Oc, stating 'no cliques, disputes, dissipation of our forces, first of all make people aware of the reality of Occitan life' (*L'Echo des Corbières* 26 October 1972, see Appendix 4).

Part Two of the thesis now examines the evolution of the political wing from 1974, and its involvement in social movement activity in France during the 1970s. The links between political Occitanism and cultural factors are investigated. The increasing marginalisation of political Occitanism from the later 1970s onwards is charted, and some of the internal issues which contributed to its problems are identified.

## **PART TWO THE OCCITAN MOVEMENT 1974-2000: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

### **Chapter 4 The political organizations**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the organizations which expressed the political ambitions of Occitanism in the period 1974-2000. It traces their growth and decline, and examines their programmes, activities, style of functioning, and membership. The particular problems encountered by the different organizations are indicated. The decision was taken to focus on VVAP and its successor, the Partit Occitan, on the grounds that since 1974 they have provided a continuous expression of political Occitanism, which has been able to secure a wider audience for Occitanist themes than has the Parti Nationaliste Occitan. Though the latter has a continuous history since 1959 it has made little impact on the public. Lutte Occitane, which was the most prominent organization between 1971 and 1974, had disappeared by 1980. A number of ephemeral groups emerged, with a regional colouration in the case of Entau País in Béarn, and a more extreme ideological programme in the case of CROC, but each had a very limited impact. The account of the evolution of the political organizations reveals the way in which political Occitanism declined during this period, and suggests some of the internal factors which contributed to their decline.

#### **4.2 VVAP 1974-1986**

##### **4.2.1 Introduction**

Touraine stated that after its creation VVAP ‘très vite devient la force principale du mouvement occitan’<sup>1</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 48). Lavelle describes it as ‘l’organisation politique de la renaissance d’Oc qui fut quantitativement la plus importante’<sup>2</sup> (Lavelle 2004: 533). This section examines the evolution of VVAP from its inception in 1974 until its dissolution in 1986. It challenges the existing literature by presenting evidence that the

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<sup>1</sup> VVAP quickly became the chief political strength of the Occitan movement

<sup>2</sup> Quantitatively the most significant political organization of the Occitan renaissance.

representation of VVAP's policies as being those of 'fundamentalist nationalism' (Keating 1988: 206) in its later years is an inaccurate assessment of its evolution under the presidency of Gustave Alirol.

#### **4.2.2 Origins**

It is necessary to clarify the significance of the title VVAP, *Volem Viure al País*. Beer translated it incorrectly as 'we want to live on the land' (Beer 1980: 20). Keating translates it as 'we want to live in this country' (Keating 1986:29), which fails to reveal the nuances and implications of the word 'païs' in Occitan. The French equivalent, 'pays', can mean country, but also, region, local area, or even village. In Occitan it usually implies the local area. As such, the theme of 'living in our own area' developed as a protest against the exodus from Occitan territories to northern France, in quest of employment, which was one aspect of the internal colonialism thesis. Lafont argued in 'La Révolution Régionaliste' that the 'pays', which in earlier times was defined as the geographical area around a community with a market, which acted as a focal point for the commercial, financial and administrative functions of that area, should become the basis of a new administrative order, which would be closer to the local community than that based on the Napoleonic départements (Lafont 1967: 245). In Occitanist ideology 'païs' came to be identified, as De La Pierre explains, with a sort of territorial district made up of communes characterized by their homogeneity at geographical, economic and human level (De La Pierre 1993: 102). The expression 'volem viure al país' first appeared as a slogan during the intervention of Occitan militants on the Larzac plateau, and in defence of the Languedocian viticulteurs, two circumstances in which the right to live in one's own area was being defended. From its first appearance on banners and tracts during a demonstration by the peasants of the Larzac in November 1971, it came to be taken up more widely as an expression of protest against unemployment and exile, and the ruin of the region. *Lutte Occitane* in its journal orchestrated a campaign against the exodus from Occitania, under the title 'the right to live at home', thus making this theme, protesting against the forced mobility of workers, an aspect of its resistance to capitalism (Holohan and Quéré 1978: 10). It can thus be seen that the title of the groups *Volem Viure al País* which formed in 1974 had implicit in it a discourse which had significance both for existing Occitan militants, and for a wider public

within the Occitan territories. As De La Pierre points out, the research of Touraine, Holohan and Quéré has underlined the fact that the general theme of 'volem viure al país' became usable by the most diverse political options, from the developmentalist regionalism of the official left to the 'communalism' of autogestionary utopia, from the anti-centralism of local notables looking for more power to the populism of defenders of a 'pays' placed in a local and backward culture (De La Pierre 1993b:103).

The circumstance which led to the appropriation of the slogan as the title of a political organization of the Occitan movement was the attempt of Robert Lafont in 1974 to stand as a presidential candidate, representing the minorities of France. His candidature was rejected by the Constitutional Council (see Ch.3.4). The programme designed for his abortive campaign was taken up by the committees which had been established to support his candidature, which met together at Montpellier on April 24 1974, where they decided on the creation of the committees of VVAP. On May 11 more than 4000 people met at Sigean to discuss with Lafont (Formaggio 1976: 214), and to promote the development of new committees.

#### **4.2.3 The aims of VVAP**

The seven points of Lafont's campaign which appeared as the manifesto of VVAP (cited in Tautil 1997: 23-30) explained their perception of the situation of the Occitans.

- 1) They defined themselves as a national minority, oppressed, and deprived of the full use of its language and historic culture, the same as others in France like the Bretons and Corsicans. They demanded the right to defend cultural difference, which they felt was happening in countries other than France.
- 2) They describe themselves as 'colonisés de l'intérieur'. The natural resources of their territory (e.g. bauxite and natural gas) were exported without feeding industrial development within the region. Paris and Brussels were accused of condemning Occitan agriculture, and sacrificing wine production, for the benefit of other areas. Occitania was being transformed into a leisure area for others, and while the holiday industry exploited the Aquitaine and Mediterranean coasts, and the mountainous areas, the profits were drained elsewhere, whilst the tourist development provided only menial

or seasonal employment for the native population. They thus demanded regional power for the workers.

- 3) It was argued that France was not a true democracy, as it was administered from the top, controlled by a prefectorial bureaucracy, and with a 'bidon', or phony regionalization with regional assemblies without powers. They thus demanded the widening of the powers and means of the Communes, regional assemblies elected by universal suffrage, and an accountable regional executive. The aim was to create responsible citizens, with influence over their own area.
- 4) They stated that they were involved in new types of conflicts, as the class struggle in France took new forms. Employees were demanding the right to resist the capitalist principle which makes of the workers a mass capable of being moved around, and to take responsibility for organizing firms and improving their conditions. The 'autogestionnaire' current of socialism was seen as the model for such a scheme. This refers to joint worker-management control in the industrial context, but more generally to 'citizen participation' and decentralization in the political sphere (Wright 1983: 176).
- 5) They stated their support for the victims of imperialism. This included the populations of the French overseas départements and territories, and immigrant workers, displaced in the interests of economic imperialism. They opposed racism, which was seen as a way of dividing the workers.
- 6) A supra-national society was envisaged, with a Europe of workers and 'decolonized' regions.
- 7) Industrial development should take into account ecological considerations. Modern industries should be distributed throughout the countryside, pollution strictly controlled, and there should be a more rational occupation of territory. The aim would be to break down the old distinctions between rural and city dwellers, manual workers and intellectuals.

Interpretation of these points was frequently discussed in the internal bulletins of VVAP, but no further formal document was put forward until 1980, when, as VVAP was already in decline, a detailed scheme for a supra-regional Autonomous Community of Occitania, elected via universal suffrage, was put forward (in Tautil 1997: 275-285). The links with the thinking of the contemporary socialist currents in France is evident in the manifesto of

1974, and VVAP defined itself as a socialist autonomist movement. Alcouffe states that proposals for the development of the Occitan economy, which played an important role in the life of the organization, were envisaged within a socialist context which advocated the collectivization of the means of production, and planning of the key sectors of the economy (Alcouffe et al 1979:111-112). An insight into the evolution of VVAP's policies comes from a text proposed in 1977 by the Secrétariat de Coordination as a basis for reflection for a forthcoming General Assembly. As well as the aim of creating regional assemblies, an administrative level between the commune and the département, the 'païs', should be created. They argue in favour of Occitan receiving the status of a national language, with equal rights with French, and that it should be taught in all educational institutions in Occitania, and given greater access to radio and television (VVAP IB 15 May 1977: 9). The section on economic activity links political and economic demands, and in its overall profile reflects the influence of Lafont's internal colonialism arguments. The proposed regional assemblies should have full economic powers, and control of their own budgets. They could fight against 'capitalist exploitation' by having the right to force firms to reinvest in the regions the profits made there. Regional planning would not be centrally imposed, via DATAR, the Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire, but would be the product of local working parties. An urgent response to the continued enforced exodus of job-seekers from Occitania is demanded. Proposals include the development of craft-based industries and the relaunching of traditional activities using local resources. The development of the co-operative sector should be encouraged. Though industry should be developed, it should not be 'at any price' - the environment must be protected, and union rights for workers must be defended. Agriculture was seen as remaining indispensable to the Occitan way of life. Land should be preserved for agriculture, rather than for speculative ventures, be they conifer forests or tourist developments. The region's raw materials should be under the direct control of the region, and should be transformed locally. Alternative sources of energy such as solar and wind power should be encouraged. Infrastructure should be developed for the benefit of the local population, and not to fit in with the requirements of tourist development (VVAP IB 15 May 1977:10-12). This text, and other similar ones in the internal bulletins, reveal the influence of the contemporary ecology movement, and the idea that 'small is beautiful'. In its ideological basis, VVAP

was in line with the currents of thinking of the post 1968 social movement activity in France. Its practical involvement in that activity is discussed in Chapter 6. Pierre Maclouf, who played a significant role during the first two years of VVAP's existence, summed up their objectives:

Notre but n'est pas de conquérir le pouvoir mais de susciter des initiatives, de parvenir à drainer la sensibilité occitane dans la domaine politique, de la faire naître là où elle n'existe pas.<sup>1</sup> (Maclouf 1975: 6)

#### 4.2.4 Organization and membership

VVAP was organized in local committees, based on a village or town, with some coordination at regional and Occitan level (Touraine 1981:48). Formaggio, in his thesis on the contemporary Occitan political movement, claimed that only the acronym VVAP acted as the link or common point of the different committees which acted according to local circumstances, and which varied in their political orientation (Formaggio 1976: 147). He states that:

Au plan sociologique, ce sont des groupes de pression spontanés qui s'efforcent d'affirmer la présence 'occitan' et 'occitaniste' dans toutes les luttes qui surgissent sur le sol occitan. Leur objectif essentiel est d'apporter la coloration occitane aux mouvements protestataires qui ont pu voir le jour ça et là. Ces luttes sont parfois suscitées, mais parfois aussi 'le train est pris en marche'.<sup>2</sup> (Formaggio 1976:148-149.)

Another contemporary analysis comes from Quéré, who states that VVAP was 'pour l'essentiel une agence de coordination sans programme ni support organisationnel'<sup>3</sup>, and argues that as a result of its 'faible marquage' ( weak identification with specific issues) it was able to act as a focus of unification of popular protests (Quéré 1978:188). The second internal bulletin of VVAP states that it is not a political party or a cartel of parties (VVAP IB 2 October 1974). Until 1982 VVAP permitted 'double appartenance', membership of VVAP and a political party, which meant that members could be linked practically as well

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<sup>1</sup> Our aim is not to gain power, but to give rise to initiatives, to succeed in tapping Occitan sympathy in the political sphere, to give rise to it where it doesn't exist

<sup>2</sup> At a sociological level, they are spontaneous pressure groups which endeavour to assert the Occitan and Occitanist presence in all the conflicts which arise on Occitan soil. Their main objective is to contribute an Occitan complexion to protest movements which have arisen here and there. Sometimes the conflicts are incited, but sometimes, also they 'climb on the bandwagon'.

<sup>3</sup> Essentially an agency for coordination without a programme or organizational means of support.

as ideologically with the French left. This issue was a controversial one. In his conclusion to Viaule's booklet on political Occitanism, Felipe Gabas argues that VVAP had suffered from the consequences of 'double appartenance', as it was confronted by internal and external pressures exerted by the policies of the French left (Gabas in Viaule 2003: 60). This issue is discussed further in Section 4.2.5.

Some indication of the growth of the movement comes from Formaggio, who states that the number of committees increased from about twenty in June 1974 to fifty in June 1975 (Formaggio 1976:147), but as VVAP acted as a pressure group which reacted to local circumstances (Formaggio 1976: 148) the number of active committees varied at any given period, and there is no means of identifying membership numbers. By the end of 1976 it is clear from the internal bulletins that the somewhat euphoric period of the early years was over. The report of the Secrétariat in December 1976 draws attention to the difficulties inherent in this type of organization. It states that VVAP is not functioning properly, there had been no contact with some committees for several months, some reports coming in apparently represented individual points of view rather than the decisions of committees, no new subscriptions were arriving, and the financial situation was desperate (VVAP IB 13 December 1976: 2-3). The success of VVAP lay in its participation in the social movement activity within Occitan territory during 1974-1976. During the 1970s two sets of circumstances acted as foci for such activity – the Larzac crisis, and the protests of Languedocian viticulteurs against French government and European Community policies. As both began before the inception of VVAP, and other Occitan organizations, particularly Lutte Occitane, were involved in the protests, the decision has been made to analyse these events in a separate chapter (Chapter 6). This identifies those factors which make it possible to assert that the wave of protests were indeed social movement activity, and analyses the nature and extent of the involvement of the Occitan movement generally, and VVAP specifically.

As already indicated, a distinction must be made between the slogan 'volem viure al país', which was taken up by the majority of unions, and parties of the left, and the actual membership of the VVAP committees. Touraine suggests that a few very active militants were able to impose the Occitan flag and the banners of VVAP on demonstrations linked to



the viticulture protest, and thus establish the presence of VVAP in public opinion (Touraine 1981a: 272). It was a fact recognized by members themselves. The VVAP- Languedoc group stated :

L'écart entre notre présence d'agitation lors des événements de 75/76 et notre implantation réelle politique est important... beaucoup ne tient qu'à l'activisme d'une petite équipe.<sup>1</sup> (VVAP IB 15 May 1977: 13)

Who were these militants? Some indication can be gained from the study of the Occitan movement made by Touraine and his team during the course of a series of meetings in 1979 and 1980. He states that the majority of VVAP's militants were salaried workers, most often from the tertiary sector, and the populism of VVAP, which was aimed at the rural workers and the villages, was the idea of technicians and civil servants (Touraine 1981a: 188). From the list of participants in the meetings organized by Touraine's team the occupations of those identified as members of VVAP were high school student, student, administrative manager, secretary to a mayor, socio-cultural activity leader, employee and singer, viticulteur, unemployed, engineer (2), teacher (7) (Touraine 1981a: 75-77). This limited sample would seem to confirm his conclusion. Yves Rouquette, who was a secondary school teacher as well as poet, and VVAP activist, pointed out some of the anomalies of this situation. He stated that teachers in France tended to be attached to notions of republican secularism, which acted as a counterforce to any attachment to regionalist ideas they held. He also argued that the presence of so many teachers within the movement was a source of weakness, because 'un enseignant est le contraire d'un aventurier – ils sont bien pour discuter!'<sup>2</sup> (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). A contemporary comment on VVAP membership comes from a letter from Verdoux, one of the initiators of the shortlived Mouvement Populaire Occitan, criticizing the functioning of VVAP. Although the letter was reproduced in VVAP's internal bulletin allegedly to illustrate the lack of political clarity of this new organization, it provides a revealing insight into how VVAP was perceived by some other Occitanists. It states that VVAP had not succeeded in mass recruitment, because the claims to which they gave priority are not the same as the concerns of the workers, and thus the chances of seeing the most deprived

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<sup>1</sup> There is a considerable gap between the size of our presence during the protests in 1975 and 1976, and our real political presence...a lot depends on the activism of a small team.

<sup>2</sup> Teachers are the opposite of adventurers – they're good for discussing.

social classes turn to VVAP are nil. He describes the people who are attracted to VVAP as ‘les marginaux de la société active de l’ Occitanie, étudiants et petits fonctionnaires’ <sup>1</sup> (VVAP IB 4 April 1975: 7). Attention should be drawn to the fact that most of the militant Occitan singers who had emerged in the post 1968 period joined VVAP, and played an important role in disseminating the ideas of the organization (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 10.5.3).

Given the nature of VVAP it is not possible to speak of leaders during its most active phase, but rather of individuals who had influence over the developing ideology of the organization. There is no real documentary evidence to reveal the impact of individuals within specific committees, though the internal bulletins give the names of those who had positions within the secretariat, and refer to spokespersons during debates in the General Assembly. The fluid nature of the activity of VVAP was a problem. René Zerby, a member of VVAP, and manager of Ventadorn, which produced and distributed the Occitan militant records, stressed the lack of structure, which he compared unfavourably with contemporary organizations in Brittany (Zerby interview 6 November 2003). At an ideological level Lafont and Rouquette influenced the evolution of VVAP, yet neither held any official position, although Rouquette now claims that he was *de facto* ‘patron’ of VVAP (Rouquette interview 24 September 2003). This issue is discussed further in Chapter 9. It appears that at a practical level Gustave Alirol can claim leadership from 1978, when he was made president of VVAP, at a transitional period in its development.

#### **4.2.5 VVAP and the left**

As already stated, VVAP described itself as a socialist autonomist organization, and a significant factor in its development was its relationship with the parties of the French left. Between 1972 and 1977 the Union de la Gauche, the Common Programme of the left, was in existence, with a plan for democratic regionalization, in response to the bureaucratic regional reform of Pompidou in 1972. De La Pierre points out that the traditional electoral force of the left in the ‘Midi rouge’ (see Chapter 8.4), and the diffusion of Occitan awareness amongst the agricultural workers in particular, made democratic regionalisation

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<sup>1</sup> Those on the fringes of the working population of Occitania, students and minor civil servants.

a point of convergence which united Occitans and left in communal distrust of Paris power (De La Pierre 1993b: 105). Keating notes that VVAP, in its attempt to create a regionalist alliance with the parties of the French left, was following a precedent set in 1964 when the COEA had affiliated to the Convention des Institutions Républicaines of Mitterrand (Keating 1988: 205). The Parti Socialiste, established in 1969, and under Mitterrand's leadership from 1971, regarded regionalism with a certain degree of sympathy in its programme. This was further developed when in 1974 Rocard and the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU), to which many Occitanists belonged, joined the PS. The PSU had in the late 1960s analyzed the French situation from an internal colonialist perspective (Keating 1988: 205). A new factor in the equation was however the move of the French Communist Party (PCF) towards regionalism. As De La Pierre explains, this was a more unlikely transition, because of the PCF's Marxist-Jacobin ideology, which tended to defend the 'French nationalist' tradition, motivated often as a defence of the unity of the working class. During the period 1976-1977 the PCF federations of Languedoc, then of Provence and Midi-Pyrénées began to support the viticulteurs, and absorb the Occitan content of their protest (De La Pierre 1993b: 105-106). Keating comments that for the Occitanists:

The strategy of co-operation with the French left was a two-edged sword. While providing a realistic prospect of achieving results, it did tend to demobilize the movement as an independent force. (Keating 1986:29)

As the PS took up the concept of 'volem viure al país', and extended it to 'volem viure e treballar al país' (we want to live and work in our own area) and flags with the hammer and sickle flew alongside banners with the Occitan cross at workers' demonstrations, for example in the occupation of Sète in Languedoc in defence of fishermen's employment (De La Pierre 1993b:106) it is possible to state that VVAP had in the mid 1970s fulfilled the tribune function, that of 'exerting pressure on policies from opposition' (De Winter 1998: 250). Keating has observed that among minor peripheralist autonomist parties (and it seems reasonable to include VVAP, although not technically a party) it is common for their influence to be as a result of their impact on the mainstream left, via 'ideological contagion and electoral competition' rather than by direct influence on the state. He cites Scotland, Wales, Andalusia, Catalonia and Languedoc as examples of territories crucial to the national electoral prospects of the mainstream left (Keating 1992: 74). He points out that the fact that the French left was excluded from power in the period 1958-1981 meant that

the adoption of support for a 'territorial dispersal of power' became part of their strategy for a reconquest of power (Keating 1992: 75).

Members of VVAP were aware of the ambiguities of their relationship with the left, and not all were happy with it. Touraine states that the debates of the Occitan movement, in its press or in the meetings of VVAP, were dominated by the opposition of two strategies: autonomous action or alliance with the French left (Touraine 1981a: 188). In 1977 the Union of the Left broke up, and the left was unsuccessful in the 1978 legislative elections. These circumstances contributed to the increasing tensions within VVAP. Already weakened by the internal debate over its future orientation after the violence of Montredon in March 1976 (see Ch.6.5) which had brought an end to the mass mobilization in support of the viticulteurs (De La Pierre 1993b:104), VVAP was further weakened when some of VVAP's erstwhile supporters, including Lafont, moved increasingly to involvement with the PCF, whilst others began to adopt a more nationalist line. Internal bulletins of VVAP reveal the internal conflicts during this period. An unnumbered bulletin, giving a delayed report on VVAP's General Assembly at Narbonne, December 1977, includes a letter (p.7) from a member of the Agen committee, who writes of a 'climat insupportable'<sup>1</sup> during the meeting. He protests against some speakers who had spoken of 'un sentiment patriotique français à démolir pour le remplacer par la conscience d'une patrie occitane à créer'<sup>2</sup>, and went on to say that they were clearly talking, in a tone which reminded one only too well that Maurras was Occitan, not about autonomy, but about separatism, independence, equally illusory and misleading. From 1978 VVAP's numbers declined. One response to this decline was the attempt in 1979 to unify VVAP and Lutte Occitane into a common organization. Martel states that a 'rather distrustful rapprochement' had begun from 1976. The report of VVAP's General Assembly at Narbonne reveals the conflict and ill-feeling which arose when the possibility of a link with Lutte Occitane was discussed. The debate is described as being of 'une rare violence', during which Rouquette led those who were opposed to any agreement with Lutte Occitane, although in the end it was agreed by a narrow majority that as a first stage a shared journal should be established (VVAP IB

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<sup>1</sup> An intolerable atmosphere.

<sup>2</sup> A French patriotic sentiment to be demolished, to be replaced by awareness of an Occitan homeland to be created.

Report on AG December 1977: 1). In 1979 a special meeting was held at Figeac, where a formal attempt was made to fuse the two organizations. This failed, as representatives of Lutte Occitane walked out, after refusing to accept the result of the vote on the proposed title of a unified group (VVAP IB May 1979). Lafont published an article in No.129 of Sud , accusing VVAP of being responsible for the failure of the attempted fusion, and for having attempted to eradicate Lutte Occitane, and reproaching VVAP as a whole for the nationalistic views of those members who had set up the review Aici e Ara. A strong response to Lafont's article appeared in VVAP's September bulletin, which pointed out that Lafont had not attended the meeting at Figeac, so was not aware of the details of the proceedings, and that the group Aici e Ara 'parle en son nom personnel et n'est pas le porte-parole du mouvement MSAO-VVAP'<sup>1</sup> (VVAP IB September 1979: 6-7). It can be seen therefore that rather than unification, this period, as Keating notes, saw a further dispersal of Occitanists, as Lafont and his followers moved further away from VVAP, associating themselves with the hexagonal left until the 1981 presidential elections<sup>2</sup> (Keating 1986: 29).

#### **4.2.6 VVAP 1980-1986**

The period 1980-1986 can in one sense be seen as a period of further decline, but it is contended here that it is possible to see it in a more positive sense, as a period of critical self-analysis and readjustment to changing political and economic circumstances. Keating has suggested that VVAP 'for its part, moved increasingly in the direction of fundamentalist nationalism, with attacks on the French left as well as the right' (Keating 1988: 206). As Keating does not define exactly what is meant by 'fundamentalist nationalism' one is left to deduce from the context, from which it appears that he is referring to extremist ideas advocating complete separatism for Occitania. Examination of the documentary evidence for the period 1980-1986 suggests that the term 'fundamentalist nationalism' is not an appropriate description of the point of view which was emerging as the proposals for the future development of the Occitan movement were being debated by

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<sup>1</sup> Speaks for itself and is not the spokesperson for VVAP

<sup>2</sup> The fracture between the different wings of the political movement was reinforced by the violent confrontation in the cultural sphere between Lafont and Rouquette and their respective supporters leading to a split in the IEO in 1980. This is discussed in Chapter 5.3

Alirol, as President, and the core of supporters who remained. It should be pointed out also that VVAP's criticisms of the left's achievements in office, 1981-1986, specifically with regard to the deficiencies of the decentralization reforms, were very similar to those which have been cited by objective academic observers, and can perhaps be justified, rather than interpreted as a move to the right as part of a drift to 'fundamental nationalism'. It was the supporters of Aïci e Ara, and not VVAP members as a whole, who had moved towards a radical Occitan nationalism, purged of all socialist type references (Martel 1989: 19). Rouquette, who was described by Keating as a 'fundamentalist nationalist' (Keating 1986: 30), but whose views were in fact too ambiguous, as Abrate has pointed out (Abrate 2001: 537), to make such a clear-cut label appropriate had in any case by 1982 abandoned active political involvement, and certainly now states that he is not a separatist (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). Keating's analysis makes no reference to the ideological development of VVAP during the period 1981-1986 under the influence of Alirol (see Chapter 9.4).

Where, therefore, did VVAP stand on the issue of nationalism by this stage? The Commission on Autonomy which met at Montpellier in July 1979 stated:

Nous ne sommes ni séparatistes ni indépendantistes. Nous pensons que dans le cadre hexagonal, au moins, peuvent vivre des nationalités (Corses, Basques, Bretons, Alsaciens) selon leur biais de vivre propre et en harmonie avec une nation française de type fondamentalement nouveau, tout en contrôlant très étroitement tout ce qui est nécessaire pour exister à part entière. Mais nous ne sommes pas davantage régionalistes et nous refusons la solution qui consiste à proposer plus de démocratie dans le cadre des régions programme gaullistes. C'est ce qui nous distingue de la gauche française qui demeure, à des degrés divers, régionalistes pour l'essentiel et se refuse actuellement à penser une Occitanie (31 départements) dans son ensemble <sup>1</sup>. (VVAP IB September 1979: 6)

This seems to be advocating a form of federal state for France, and this was confirmed the following year in the proposed Statute of Autonomy for Occitania which was put forward, to clarify VVAP's political strategy (document in Tautil 1997: 275-284). The institutions

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<sup>1</sup> We are neither separatists nor independentists. We think that in the hexagonal context, at least, the nationalities (Corsicans, Basques, Bretons, Alsatians) can live according to their own way of life and in harmony with a French nation of a fundamentally new type, whilst having tight control over everything that is necessary to exist separately. But neither are we regionalists and we refuse the solution which consists of proposing more democracy in the framework of Gaullist instituted regions. It is that which distinguishes us from the French left, which remains, in varying degrees, essentially regionalist, and currently refuses to consider Occitania (31 departments) as a whole.

and areas of jurisdiction envisaged are outlined in sufficient detail to make it clear that the aim is not a separate state, but a system which would create an autonomous community which would exist within the context of the French state, and in which certain aspects, such as foreign affairs, defence, coinage would continue to be the prerogative of the French state (article 12), and some aspects would be shared between the French state and the autonomous community, for example taxation, justice, education, external trade, transport and communications, social legislation (article 13). Certain areas, such as the economic development of Occitania, control of energy sources and raw materials, culture and leisure facilities, the maintenance of order, would become the exclusive domain of the elected assembly and the executive of the Community (article 11). In October 1979 an Occitanist delegation had visited Spain to witness the Catalan vote on autonomy (VVAP IB December 1979), and it seems that the Spanish situation was an influence on VVAP's thinking, a view that is confirmed by Alirol's statement that VVAP's aim was 'l'autonomie dans le cadre d'une République Française définie comme fédération d'autonomies'<sup>1</sup> (VVAP IB December 1981: 9). As De La Pierre concludes, the fundamentalist nationalist initiatives of Aïci e Ara (described as having a 'sectarian attitude' in a VVAP press release in September 1980) seemed to have scarce influence (De La Pierre 1993b: 106).

It is clear from the internal bulletins of VVAP that it is the ideas of Alirol which shape the thinking of VVAP in the period 1980-1986. It was proposed that he should try to stand in the 1981 presidential elections, but the campaign had to be abandoned as he was not able to secure sufficient official signatures to support his campaign, leading VVAP to complain that the requirement to secure five hundred signatures was a means used by the French state to make it impossible for minority candidates to stand (VVAP IB May 1981). Alirol responded to the left in government by a lengthy analysis of the current situation and the future of the Occitan movement, making it clear that VVAP needed to evolve. It was stated that VVAP had made no progress since 1980 in increasing membership, and that failure to recruit was linked to the rise of the left, and the view by some that the problems of Occitania would be solved by regionalization by the left in power (VVAP IB July 1981: 5). During this period the debate on a transition to the form of a political party was opened up,

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<sup>1</sup> Autonomy in the context of a French Republic defined as a federation of autonomous areas.

and in line with this thinking a motion was passed at the General Assembly in May 1982 to abandon the 'double appartenance', the right to be a member of both an Occitan political organization and a French political party (VVAP IB June 1982). During 1983, in response to 'une désaffection de militants et de sympathisants'<sup>1</sup> (VVAP IB 1 January 1983: 14<sup>2</sup>) a series of texts was put forward to further the debate on the future of the organization. One member, Oyarbide, argued that too many decisions were taken by a small group. He argued that the only originality of the Occitan discourse lay in the linguistic and cultural domain – but the IEO existed for that. He stated that the role of the political movement should have been to link in a common analysis cultural, social and economic factors, whereas in practice the cultural proposals 'arrive in a separate paragraph', as a complete irrelevance in a discourse which could just as well be that of the PSU, the PS, the PCF or the ecologists depending on the circumstances. He went on to state that the Occitan movement had in the past had sufficient weight, along with others, to open up the regional question which led to the PS version of decentralization, but had not been able to capitalize on this victory, which paradoxically, by watering down their ideas, had made them lose the potential for mobilization with which the economic crisis had presented them (VVAP IB 1 January 1983:15). Tautil, however, insisted on the social character of the Occitan response to the current economic situation, arguing that they should support workers in the same way as in the 1970s they had supported the viticulteurs (VVAP IB 1 January 1983: 16-17).

One major change in the orientation of VVAP during this period is in their attitude to Europe. In October 1982 at Bastia, and April 1983 in Belgium, Alirol and Tautil attended, as observers, meetings of Alliance Libre Européenne (ALE) which represents the parties of European ethnic minorities, and in April 1984 the Coordination Nationale proposed that VVAP should join ALE (VVAP IB 103 May 1984<sup>3</sup>). This marked the beginning of the idea of transnational cooperation which was later to be extended by the Partit Occitan. Keating stated that within the Occitan movement:

The tussle between fundamentalist nationalists and those looking for a transformation of the French state breaking down barriers between people in the context of a more united Europe is a constant theme. The Parti Nationaliste

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<sup>1</sup> Disaffection on the part of activists and sympathizers.

<sup>2</sup> Note new numbering system

<sup>3</sup> Note new numbering scheme again!



Occitan stands at one extreme, accused by its opponents of racism and chauvinism. VVAP was for long torn between the two positions, and with the departure of Lafont and his associates, increasingly adopted the fundamentalist posture. (Keating 1986: 30)

Whilst not denying the first statement, about the division of opinion which indeed existed between individual personalities of the Occitan movement, it is contended here, on the evidence of the internal bulletins of VVAP, that under the influence of Alirol VVAP in fact was not 'fundamentalist nationalist' in the sense implied by Keating, and had in fact by 1984 moved towards the idea of 'breaking down barriers between people in the context of a more united Europe'.

In 1986 VVAP used the opportunity of the first elections to regional assemblies to cooperate on electoral lists with other Occitanists, and in the aftermath of these elections the decision was taken to dissolve VVAP and to form a new Occitan political party.

#### **4.2.7 VVAP in retrospect**

It seems that a cleavage exists between the image of VVAP's role in Occitanism in the 1970s, which emerges from the contemporary documentation (from objective observers such as Formaggio, Quéré and Touraine as well as internal bulletins and militant publications), and the image which has subsequently been presented of it. As stated earlier, the establishment of the VVAP committees was closely linked to the political activity and ideological input of Robert Lafont. However, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, Lafont has not only distanced himself from his influence on VVAP, but in recent publications has seized the opportunity to vindicate his dissenting views in the period from 1977 onwards by in effect attempting to belittle, if not actually eradicate, the significance of VVAP's contribution to the Occitanism of the 1970s. VVAP is dismissed briefly in *Petita Istoria Europea d'Occitania* as consisting of committees impregnated with 'un nacionalisme populista anticomunista' leading to 'un isolament suicidari des movement occitanista'<sup>1</sup> (Lafont 2003: 216). In *Temps Tres* he refers to the romantic nationalism of VVAP (Lafont 1991: 120). As Rouquette stated in another context, discussing the book by Abrate (2001),

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<sup>1</sup> An anticommunist populist nationalism leading to suicidal isolation of the Occitan movement.

until that point the history of Occitania had always consisted of the version that Lafont wished to portray (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). It is suggested here that Lafont's views possibly influenced Keating's comments on VVAP, which closely follow the Lafont interpretation. Similarly Salvi, who makes clear his admiration for Lafont (Salvi 1998: 58), in his chapters on the recent history of the Occitan movement dismisses VVAP as:

Vittima di una totale anarchia organizzata. Il suo destino è di abbaiare molto senza mordere<sup>1</sup>. (Salvi 1998: 127)

Although one cannot deny the many weaknesses of VVAP as a political organization, weaknesses which were to some extent inherent in its *modus operandi*, and which reflected some of the strategic inconsistencies of the wider Occitan movement (Formaggio 1976: 337), there is a strong case for stating that it remains the Occitan political organization which has made the greatest impact. Formaggio stated that it provided a link between the theorists of Occitanism and concrete action, and that the committees provided the chief strength of the movement in 1976 (Formaggio 1976: 149). Quéré argued that though it should be seen as '*une agence de co-ordination*'<sup>2</sup> rather than a clearly structured organization, its '*porosité de frontières*'<sup>3</sup> enabled it to act as a unifying force for the popular protests of the period (Quéré 1978: 188). He indicates the significance of the fact that the Occitan intelligentsia tended to be members of VVAP, and developed an analysis of insertion into national political and union struggles, at the same time '*occitanizing*' them (Quéré 1978: 197-198). As De La Pierre states, VVAP extended its themes of ecology, autogestion, anti-militarism to a wider audience as it participated in the social movement activity of 1974-76, so that it was able to gain some success in the municipal elections of 1976, standing on lists of the left. He concludes that VVAP made an original and incisive contribution to the left, so that by 1976 '*viure, trabalhar e decidir al país*'<sup>4</sup> became a widely popular slogan, which could not be ignored by the official parties and unions (De La Pierre 1993: 102), and which contributed to the thinking which led to the socialist decentralization reforms. It is certainly true that its influence declined after 1976. Martel refers to the fact

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<sup>1</sup> Victim of complete organizational anarchy. Its destiny to 'bark a lot without biting'.

<sup>2</sup> A coordinating agency.

<sup>3</sup> The porosity of its frontiers.

<sup>4</sup> To live, work and decide in our own area

that at the special General Assembly at Figeac in 1979 VVAP and Lutte Occitane together could only gather 482 mandates, of which around 100 were for Lutte Occitane (Martel 1989: 13). It has been argued here however that it is inappropriate to portray the final years of VVAP as a decline into a conservative and inward looking 'fundamental nationalism', and that in fact the period 1980-1986 was one of debate and transition, during which the ground work was laid for the creation of a political party, the Partit Occitan, which was capable of adapting to the changed political environment of the later 1980s.

### **4.3 The Partit Occitan**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction**

Since 1987 the Partit Occitan has been the only Occitan political organization which has been able both to maintain a consistent history, and have a membership which though small, has been sufficiently large for it to engage in its stated aim of participating regularly in the electoral arena. There is very little academic reference to this party. Lynch refers to it, in the context of its affiliation to the European Free Alliance, as a 'micro-party', too small to be considered a small party (Lynch 1998: 196). Jeanjean, the Australian academic of Occitan origin, described his attendance at the meeting in Toulouse in April 1986 where the establishment of the party was discussed (Jeanjean 1992: 121-125), and then discussed his personal opinions on the functioning of the party after his 4 yearly visit to southern France in 1990 (Jeanjean 1992: 160-174). This provides a fairly limited analysis. In his recent book on the political and cultural history of Occitania from its origins to the present day, Lavelle allots less than two pages specifically to the Partit Occitan (Lavelle 2004: 548-549). As detailed in the methodology, it has been necessary to construct the history and analysis of this party from the available documentary sources, and interviews.

#### **4.3.2 Origins**

What were the circumstances which led to the establishment of a new Occitan political party in 1987? The Occitan movement had had a high profile in France during the 1970s, with VVAP, as discussed earlier, providing the principal political strength of the movement (Touraine 1981a: 48), even though it acted as a pressure group rather than a political party. By 1980 the movement as a whole was in decline. The problems which Formaggio identified in 1976, the division of the movement into those who were purely 'culturalists' and those who took a political stance, tensions within the IEO over the members' interpretation of its role, the friction between those who saw Occitania as a nation, and those who saw it as a cultural community (Formaggio 1976: 246), had been exacerbated rather than resolved. In addition by 1981 the political environment within which the movement operated had changed, with the accession of the left to power in France, and the subsequent introduction of the Defferre decentralization legislation. Lafont

identified the period 1981-1983 as the point at which the Occitan political movement disappeared (Lafont 2003: 218). Lutte Occitane had disbanded, and VVAP had disappeared from the active political arena (Lafont 1991: 122) (see 4.2.6). During the period 1981-1986 Gustave Alirol and a small number of VVAP members who had continued to meet began to debate a future course for the movement. The catalyst which provoked the decision to attempt to regroup the remnants of the movement of the late 1970s, and to consolidate them into a political party, was provided by the first regional elections in March 1986. Disillusionment had already set in over the perceived practical results of the decentralization reforms – lack of real reform of the electoral system, the maintenance of the power of the département, lack of reform of the system of taxation and of financial resources allocated to the region, and failure to implement the linguistic and cultural policies which had been anticipated from the socialists (Tautil 1997: 16). A number of Occitanists therefore decided to stand in the regional elections. As the elections were fought on a system of proportional representation minority groups had hoped to gain some success, but the creation of a 5% threshold meant that many were disappointed (Lynch 1996: 96). The Occitanists gained only between 1% and 2.55%, so the decision was made that to gain greater electoral success it was necessary to rally Occitanists on an electoral front, and that union was the only way to move forward (VVAP IB 114 1986: insert). A meeting was held at Toulouse in April 1986 to discuss this project. Jeanjean, who attended this meeting, recorded his impressions. He noted the enthusiasm of the participants, but was critical of certain aspects of the meeting which he felt indicated the likelihood of future problems. He felt that their approach was amateurish, and was particularly shocked by the apparent lack of knowledge about the functioning and scope of the regional councils to which some had recently attempted to get elected. He suggested that speakers from Provence and Béarn were treated as inferiors, and subjected to sardonic looks, and therefore doubted the extent of the commitment to unity. Jeanjean felt that there was an inappropriate amount of self-satisfaction, and a lack of self-criticism in analyzing their recent electoral performance. He considered that their proposals for the structure of the proposed new party were unimaginative, following the centralized and hierarchical pattern of existing hexagonal parties (Jeanjean 1992: 121-123). Jeanjean's observations raise a number of issues which were subsequently to be problems for party members

themselves: the desire to maintain a pan-Occitanist viewpoint (as promoted strongly by Alirol) in the face of localist tendencies among Occitanists particularly in Béarn and Provence; the relationship between the Bureau National, (the executive of the party), and the local committees; and the problems of ‘educating’ party members into the intricacies of the French electoral and administrative systems.

#### **4.3.3 The aims of the party**

A congress held at Toulouse in May 1987 formally instituted the statutes and the charter of the Partit Occitan. The charter states that the party is open to all who accept the existence of ‘le fait Occitan’<sup>1</sup> in its historical dimension, and its new embodiments resulting from its revival and reconstruction. It brings together all those who wish to participate in current political debates, and economic and social issues. The Partit Occitan acts by all democratic means, and in particular via the electoral process. The fourth clause states that the party is ‘pour l’autonomie’, which it defines as a commitment to a self-governing Occitan society but strictly respectful of all the rules of democracy.

The party intends to lead the fight for the recognition of the Occitan community, the complete rehabilitation of the Occitan language and culture, and the defence of its members’ interests, both inside and outside the French state, in particular at the European level. The latter point is extremely significant, as it marked a major change of tactics from the policies of VVAP. The party states that the building of a Europe of peoples and regions is one of its most urgent tasks. Additionally it supports the values of the defence of social and economic justice, respect for human rights, solidarity with the Third World, and action in favour of peace. Finally, respect for the planet is advocated, and in its support for ecological themes the Partit Occitan echoes an important aspect of VVAP’s aims (Charte du Partit Occitan IB 1 August 1987: 27).

How these rather vaguely worded objectives came to be visualized in reality is revealed in an advertisement and application form for membership of the Partit Occitan (Lo Cebier 58

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<sup>1</sup> The Occitan phenomenon.

February 2000). It asks the questions ‘what do we want, and who are we?’ Their objectives are defined thus.

- 1) The recognition of the Occitan community by France, Spain, Italy and the European Community.
- 2) Wide autonomy for Occitania, over the whole area of the extension of the Occitan language (including the Occitan valleys of the Italian state, and the Val d’Aran within the Spanish state).
- 3) The creation of an Assembly of the Autonomous Community of Occitania, with its own executive, and uniting the elected representatives of the Auvergne, Dauphiné, Gascony, Guyenne, Languedoc, Limousin and Provence.
- 4) The introduction of a co-ordinated policy for the Occitan area, based on a plan for long term development, social justice and respect for the environment.
- 5) A cultural policy placing the Occitan language in a prominent position from school to university, in public life, and in the media.
- 6) Direct representation of the Autonomous Community of Occitania in the European institutions, in the context of a federal Europe of peoples and regions.

The Partit Occitan is described as an autonomous progressive movement, acting within the democratic framework of pluralist political life. The use of violence to obtain their objectives is rejected. They condemn all forms of racism, totalitarianism, and national chauvinism.

A further insight into the motivation and expectations of the new party comes from the opening speech (reported in P.Oc. IB 1 August 1987) of the May Congress at Toulouse, by Gustave Alirol, its first (and to date only) president. He stressed the need for unity within the Occitan movement, describing the 1979 meeting at Figeac, when attempts had been made to link VVAP and Lutte Occitane, as a missed opportunity. The factionalism within the movement had been a significant cause of its failure to benefit as fully as it might have done from the wave of sympathy for ethnoregionalism which France had experienced in the post 1968 era. Alirol emphasized the need for the modernization of Occitan political discourse, to take into account the generalized economic crisis in France, which meant that the internal colonialism arguments of the 1970s could no longer be defended, and the

changed political environment due to the arrival of the left in power. He was anxious to get rid of a certain type of abstract discourse, or ‘un discours de langue de bois’ (waffle or cant), which had affected Occitanism in the past, but nevertheless paid tribute to the achievements of the Occitanists of the 1970s, including their contribution to the debate on decentralization. Occitanism must be freed from the ‘passéisme’ or attachment to the past with which the cultural wing in particular had been associated. He emphasized, however, that as the Occitanist combat is above all one of identity, it must combine cultural and political action, and the party must count on a wider cultural base to support it, especially at elections. He made it clear that the main difference from the Occitanism of the 1970s is the attitude of the new party towards Europe. For many of the militants of VVAP the Europe of the EEC had been a ‘bête noire’, but Alirol insisted that Europe must be a priority. In this respect Alirol was bringing the Partit Occitan in line with the aspect of the ‘new regionalism’ which has been identified as the significant factor in the evolution of ethnoregionalism in the late 1980s and 1990s. As Keating explains, regional interests have made a ‘positive engagement’ with the EU, bypassing the state, and using Europe as a source of support for minority cultures and languages under threat (Keating 1998: 163). In response to a question on the position of the Partit Occitan on the political spectrum, Alirol stated that in contrast to the Occitanists of the 1970s, who contributed ideas and votes to the hexagonal left, the aim was to maintain autonomy of action. He then went on to discuss the potential strategy for elections, an issue which was to become crucial in the future development of the party, and which will be examined in detail below.

To summarize, the aims of the party were to promote unity amongst Occitanists, to maintain a pan-Occitan perspective, independent of hexagonal political parties, and via its entry into the electoral arena to promote the economic, social and cultural welfare of Occitania. Its ultimate objective was the creation of an autonomous Occitan region, within the French State, in the manner of Catalonia in Spain, and which would eventually become a part of a re-structured Europe of peoples and regions.



#### **4.3.4 Organization and membership**

According to Müller-Rommel, in regionalist parties an open and flexible party organization with a high possibility of formal participation at all levels of the hierarchy should produce a high level of political mobilization among members and followers (Müller-Rommel 1998: 25). How was the new party to be organized? The intention was to secure implantation throughout Occitania via a series of local committees. In a hierarchical structure there were to be in addition regional committees, and a Conseil National, the party's parliament, where delegates from the regional federations meet twice a year. A Congress was to be held every two years which all party members were entitled to attend, and which would elect the Bureau National, the party executive. The local committees which were to form the base of the party could represent a town, a canton or a département (P.Oc. IB 1 August 1987: 12). The early internal bulletins refer to the establishment of the committees. According to the Conseil National meeting in Béziers in October 1987 there were often 10 to 15 members in local committees, but in a number of areas there was no organization, and there were a number of isolated members of the party. The difficulties of setting up a new party were made worse by the lack of effective propaganda methods- leaflets, posters, and access to the media (P.Oc. IB 3 February 1988: 15). Tarn Informations December 18 1987 describes a meeting in which Alirol came to introduce himself to the Tarn section of the party. It states that the public at the meeting consisted of about fifteen supporters or the simply curious, and adds that the Partit Occitan may have honourable intentions, but for the moment it is not bringing in the crowds. In February 1988 J. Pince produced a statement on the state of the party (P.Oc. IB 4 April 1988: 3-4). He argued that one of the first stages was to obtain at least one committee per Occitan region. This had been achieved except in Drôme-Ardèche, the Occitan part of the region Rhône-Alpes. The second stage was to aim for at least one committee per département. This was more difficult, but essential from the psychological point of view of gaining credibility to deal with local problems. Even small committees of three or four members would be sufficient to create a reference point and contact address. Strong committees would have the responsibility of encouraging the creation of at least minimum committees in neighbouring départements. In addition, the regional committee of Provence would have the responsibility of maintaining contact with the Occitan valleys of Italy, and that of Midi-Pyrénées with the Val d'Aran in Spain, thus

reinforcing the commitment to a pan-Occitan political vision. The committee of Languedoc was to create links with Catalonia, whilst the Bureau National was to establish firm relations with other hexagonal minorities, which suggests an increasingly outward-looking attitude.

Was this the 'open and flexible' organization advocated for successful mobilization? One answer comes in the form of a stinging critique of the party made by Oliver Martin during the party congress at Narbonne in October 1989 (reported in P.Oc. IB 16 October 1989: 9-10. Jeanjean 1992 refers to the critique, p.163, although he does not name his source). Martin criticized the construction of the party as being artificial and emanating from the top. He referred to 'self-proclaimed' leaders, and ghost committees which never convened. He complained of a lack of democratic practice, with communiqués decided without consultation from the base, and proposed that leaders of groups should be elected, to prove representative of the grass roots. He claimed that among party members there was more sympathy than real engagement in the cause. (Martin had a few kind words for the Provence committee, which he stated had developed original viewpoints, had the most active members, and had regular meetings where the actions of the party were discussed and decided.) Jordi Escartin, a member of the party from its inception until 1998, and for a period member of the Bureau National, confirmed Jeanjean's impression of a very hierarchical structure. He indicated that resentment was felt when information and ideas transmitted from a local committee to the Bureau National were ignored, and reports failed to appear in the Internal Bulletin. It was this which had persuaded him to stand for membership of the Bureau National himself (Escartin interview June 13 2004). On the other hand, it is apparent that apathy among party members was a problem. Tautil, as spokesperson for the party, made a scathing attack on the lack of action of members, including the fact that members who had had responsibilities attributed to them 'give no sign of life, don't answer letters, send no reports of activity, and don't phone' (P.Oc. IB 26 January 1991:5). In March he is complaining that 'on ne peut pas éternellement se reposer sur les mêmes' (We can't endlessly rely on the same people). This presents the other side of the coin to the criticism that a small group of members dominated the party, and reflects the problems experienced in any small political party.

The question of actual membership numbers is not easy to address, as like most small (and other) parties, the Partit Occitan has tended not to advertise these statistics. Martin argued that the bureaucratic structure did not correspond to any real activity, indicated most clearly by the fact that the initial objective of 500 members within two years had not been met. A set of figures on votes on some issues, reproduced in Internal Bulletin 17, December 1989, refers to 348 mandates. Jeanjean estimated that during his 1990 visit to Occitania the evidence suggested at the most 100 members, distributed unevenly throughout Occitania. Strong points were the Tarn and Aude départements, and Toulouse, but a number of départements had no members (Jeanjean 1992:164). More recent figures are revealed by Pince in a letter to party members as a contribution to the forthcoming party congress. He stated that he thought that the party was in a poor state. It had gone from 130 members to less than 100 members currently (P.Oc. IB 61 July 1998:19-20). Interestingly two local press accounts of party congresses refer to the presence of about 50 delegates of a party which has about 500 members (L'Indépendent de Narbonne October 23 1989) or about a thousand members (La Dépêche du Midi March 5 1996). No evidence elsewhere supports the idea of such numbers, and it is impossible to assess whether the publication of these figures is the result of journalistic incompetence, or a deliberate attempt by the party to improve its image. It is true that party membership is not in itself the only measure of support for the policies of a political party, a fact that was emphasized by Escartin. His experience for example of the committee of Narbonne, one of the more active committees, was that there were regularly around twenty people at weekly meetings, but only about five were members of the party (Escartin interview June 13 2004). It seems reasonable to conclude on the basis of the available evidence that membership has remained below 500, and for much of the party's existence has been not much above one hundred, with many of those members being long-term ones, as revealed by the recurrence of the same names in the party documentation.

#### **4.3.5 The role of individuals in the Partit Occitan**

A striking factor of the Partit Occitan is the extreme commitment of a key group of individuals, who have maintained their involvement in the party since its origin, in spite of

frequent disappointment at the results of their efforts. Sergi Viaule, one of the party's most committed militants, has written that the party has been, in spite of its inadequacies, the only Occitan political party to attain a level of development allowing it to be recognized on the Occitan political scene, and this has been possible thanks to the self-sacrifice of its militants 'qui pour certains leur consacrent leur vie'<sup>1</sup> (Viaule 2003: 45). In addition Tautil, the chief influence on the party in Provence, has emphasized that the involvement in elections demands sacrifices from individuals, and often from their families (P.Oc. IB 46 December 1994: 14). For some this became too much of a burden. Escartin stated that a contributory factor to his resignation from the party was the fact that once he had a wife and family he was no longer willing to make the sacrifices that his financial commitment to the electoral process had necessitated (Escartin interview November 4 2003). Escartin also provided an interesting perspective on the continued domination of the party by its original key members, most of whom had been involved in the Occitanism of the 1970s. He indicated that although he had a great deal of respect for senior members like Alirol, Tautil, Viaule and Vilotte, he sometimes felt frustrated, as a younger member, by their tendency at times to mull over 'the old days' (Escartin interview November 5 2003). More seriously, he believed that in spite of Alirol's positive actions for the regeneration of the party image (see Chapter 9.4), Tautil and Viaule in particular were perceived by the public as the old style of militant 'pur et dur'. Tautil was described as having kept his culture of militantism from his early days in the Communist party, and Escartin, though admiring his courage and hard work, found him too rigid and hierarchical in his approach, and too intellectualizing to secure a positive response from the general public. Viaule was described as a hard line militant, rather dogmatic in his views (strongly anti-nuclear and pro-ecology), but who by his efforts had created an effective committee in the Albi area (Escartin interview June 13 2004). Viaule himself to some extent corroborates this assessment, when in the preface to his booklet 'Un siècle d'occitanisme politique' he describes it as the work of a militant, rather than of a historian, and states that some will find the text not very objective in the presentation of some of the different movements and political parties described in it. He adds that although he may have interpreted the facts, he denies revising or transforming them, and thus his work is more honest than many books published by French historians. It

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<sup>1</sup> Who in the case of some, have devoted their whole life to it.

is recognized that Escartin himself may not be entirely objective in his assessments, bearing in mind that he has confronted the Bureau National on a number of issues. Nevertheless, it is clear that for him and at least one other young former member of the *Partit Occitan*, Domergue Soumien, who left it to form CROC (see Chapter 4.4.5) after criticizing a number of its aspects (for example in P.Oc. IB 38 August 1993: 12) a generation gap exists between those formed in the ‘post soixante-huitard’ period,<sup>1</sup> and younger supporters, who feel that their points of view are not sufficiently taken into consideration. It is possible that this continuing association of the leadership with the 1970s generation contributes to the difficulties in securing the regeneration of party membership.

#### **4.3.6 The electoral progress of the *Partit Occitan***

It is clear that the party has had very limited success in extending and renewing its membership base. Was it able to secure in the electoral arena the support of sympathizers for its policies? In his opening speech to the Constituent Congress Alirol had emphasized that the aim would be to create an organization which would be mandated by voters to achieve its policies. Participation in the cantonal elections would provide a means of getting their ideas more widely represented. In the municipal elections they would not necessarily stand ‘with the Occitan flag’, but could be part of either an apolitical or a political list. In spite of the problems of cost, they would like to participate in the European elections in alliance with other similar groups in France. They were optimistic that in future regional elections they would have greater success than those Occitanists who had stood in 1986 (P.Oc. IB 1 August 1987: 7). The first internal bulletin contains the report of a preliminary commission on elections, which states that the choice of candidates and electoral alliances should be based on local factors. Even if not successful in terms of votes, each campaign would help with the dissemination of the ideas of the party, and could have results in the future.

The commission suggested they would be willing to consider the possibility of electoral alliances with almost any group except the Front National, as long as they were broadly

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<sup>1</sup> A generation which for a period had been imbued with an anti-establishment and to some degree utopian spirit in the aftermath of the events of May 1968.

sympathetic to the party's political aims and not just to Occitan cultural aims. In practice this considerably narrowed the field of potential allies. A major issue for the future was the quest to find 'compatible' allies. Although the leaders were anxious to avoid committing the party to a precise place on the left-right spectrum, being sensitive to the criticism that Occitanism had been subservient to the left in the 1970s, it was conceded that most party members would place themselves on the left of such a spectrum. This led, for example, at the 1989 municipal elections in Aix-en-Provence, to Hervé Guerrera becoming the first Partit Occitan representative to be present at the second round in a town of more than 100,000 inhabitants, after agreeing to join the P.S. list as an independent. The list gained 51.27% of the vote, and subsequently Guerrera became one of the Partit Occitan's most effective politicians, obtaining the responsibility for developing Provençal culture in Aix. In the same election Claude Molinier was elected on a list of Union of the Left at Béziers (P.Oc. IB 13 April 1989: 15-16). In general, however, it was accepted that for most elections alliance with the Verts provided the best option, on the grounds that the Occitanists were concerned by environmental issues, and the Verts had expressed sympathy for regionalist aspirations, and were open to the idea of Europe. Reservations were expressed by some Partit Occitan members as they felt that there was a gap between the ideas and programmes of the leaders of the Verts, and the grass roots members who, it was claimed, were sometimes anti-Occitanist. It was also pointed out that such alliances could alienate those who supported the southern French passions for hunting and the bullring (P.Oc. IB 16 October 1989:2). In spite of these reservations, in many elections candidates did form lists with representatives of ecological groups- although this was not necessarily a passport to greater success, given the fragmentation of, and internal conflicts within, French environmental groups themselves during the 1990s (Szarka 2000: 28-30).

One more ambitious scheme of alliance was that instituted by the Partit Occitan in Provence, which has worked with Région-Provence, a movement incorporating regionalists of various types, (including members of largely cultural groups such as Parlaren, the Institut d'Etudes Occitanes and the Félibrige, plus groups for the defence of nature, and agents of local development) and which examines and makes proposals concerning the economy, ecology, town and country planning, tourism etc. (Lo Cebier 9 December 1991: 2). Tautil has supported this strongly, and he and others in the Provence branch of the

Partit Occitan have participated in elections since 1992 under this dual title (P.Oc. IB 61 July 1998:11). In 2001 the committees of Région Provence merged with the Provençal committees of the Partit Occitan, but maintained their right to autonomy of action (Viaule 2003: 51). Although a positive step in terms of active involvement and co-operation in the local community, it has not lead to the hoped for electoral success. (As discussed in Chapter 8.4 the strong presence of the Front National in Provence complicates the issue.)

Another aspect of electoral tactics for a small party such as the Partit Occitan is the decision as to whether to advise its members on their use of the vote in elections where it is not presenting a candidate, and whether candidates eliminated in the first round should advise their supporters as to their use of the vote in the second round of elections. There does not appear to be a consistent policy on this issue, except in the case of tactical voting against Front National candidates by encouraging votes for a left wing candidate. Lavelle states that the Partit Occitan has given itself a reasonable objective, to obtain in certain regions a high enough number of votes for the large parties, principally the PS, to be induced to negotiate with it (Lavelle 2004: 549), but for the moment this seems unlikely to be attained.

What level of electoral success has the Partit Occitan obtained? The overall electoral performance has remained largely constant throughout the life of the party, with scores generally between 1% and 3% of the votes cast. The greatest levels of success, as one might anticipate, have been in local elections, in villages and small towns where the candidate could be known to the electorate. As an editorial by Erich Ducrocq in *La Dépêche du Midi* pointed out, commenting on the 1988 cantonal elections (reproduced in P.Oc. IB 11 January 1989) :

Ce genre de scrutin n'est pas forcément ressenti par les électeurs comme une élection politique. Au même titre que les municipales, les cantonales sont à mettre dans la catégorie dites de proximité ... où le poids de l'étiquette n'est pas fondamental dans le résultat définitif <sup>1</sup>

He also points out, however, that it is above all an election of notables, in which the outgoing candidate always has an advantage, and not much space is left for 'the small candidates', 'les petits'. The main exception to the 'less than 5%' trend has

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<sup>1</sup> This type of election is not necessarily considered to be a political election by the voters. Like the municipal elections, the cantonales should be placed in the so-called proximity elections... where the weight of the label is not crucial to the final result.

consistently been Alirol, who has maintained his position as mayor of Saint Hostien (Haute Loire), and has gained scores of 16% in cantonal elections (e.g. cantonales 1998 16.7%). In this area he does seem to fulfill the role of 'notable'.

Insights into the practical difficulties of the quest for electoral success can be gained from a study of the internal bulletins. In addition, interviews with, and access to the personal documentation of, Escartin have provided a personal perspective on the problems which the electoral candidates of the party have experienced. A number of candidates stood in the cantonal elections of September 1988. Their electioneering leaflets, reproduced in Internal Bulletin 11 (January 1989), give an indication of the tactics used. The leaflets were clearly based on a template provided by the leadership, with identical introductions and conclusions, and key aspects of their programmes. Themes were those relevant to the local rural area, such as the provision of funding for roads, and the need to replace dying local industries with new ones. There was also a demand for the establishment of departmental Occitan cultural centres. Five candidates gained between 2.34% and 3.84% of the vote. The lack of success is emphasized by the fact that in four cases the Front National candidate obtained a higher score. (The effect of the growth of the Front National on the potential for securing the de-aligned and disillusioned voter is discussed in Chapter 8.4) An exception to this pattern of low scores was Guy David's result in the Cintegabelle bye-election of December 1988, caused by the death of a prominent local member of the Parti Socialiste. In this small canton of 3,128 inhabitants, Lionel Jospin, at that time Education Minister, was brought in from Paris as the P.S. candidate. Jospin gained 57.5% of the vote, while David gained the unusually high score of 10.13%. A press cutting from the Journal de Toulouse refers to the surprisingly large turnout (72% participation), and Le Figaro (December 12 1988, cited Jeanjean 1992:173) referred to the 'score étonnant du Partit Occitan'<sup>1</sup>. According to David, his result was due to recognition of Occitanism, while others claimed it was just an accident caused by the lack of suspense in the election. As a means of promoting more effective electioneering amongst other party members David explained how he felt he had managed to gain this score (P.Oc. IB 11: Insert). He had taken time off from his post in the S.N.C.F. to visit all the smallholdings in the area,

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<sup>1</sup> The surprising score of the Partit Occitan.



emphasizing that ‘you must look electable-wearing a tie’. He had organized a series of public meetings (with a free drink) in each commune, all well publicized in advance in the local paper. Although he had used the Occitan flag and banners, and was promoting Occitan ideas, he had ensured that his language was accessible to his audience. Although a lot of people had wanted to abstain, weary of a recent round of elections, he had succeeded in encouraging a high level of participation. David claimed that any Occitan candidate, with active effort and a bit of psychology, should be able to pass the 5% threshold which made possible the refund of part of the electoral expenses. Jeanjean suggests that this commentary perhaps indicated the beginning of a process of political maturation, even if it was too early to draw long-term conclusions (Jeanjean 1992: 174).

David’s optimistic assessment is countered by the information on the 1989 municipal elections (P.Oc. IB 13 April 1989). In the Ariège area two prospective Partit Occitan candidates withdrew because of opposition to Occitan ideas by other members of the proposed list. Chabrouty, who had gained 3.75% of the vote in the cantonal elections, decided not to stand at Pradelles, claiming (in spite of two previous mandates) that he could not draw up a list which was sure of being elected. His explanation of the reasons for his decision gives an insight into the personal level of the functioning of the political scene at grass roots level, particularly in rural society. He talks of the resentment of certain farmers and landowners who saw the renaissance of the village as an impediment to their traditional habits. On the other hand, some of the ‘néo-ruraux’, newcomers to the village, were disappointed at the level of facilities. He refers to the active anti-Occitanism of ‘une famille franchimande’, (an Occitan term to denote someone from the North of France). He also admits to blunders during his previous mandate, but does not enlarge upon this statement. In the Tarn area the candidate for Figeac claimed that he was not elected ‘for many reasons personal and local’. Such examples act as a reminder of the inappropriateness of over-attributing the capacity for electoral success to central party guidance.

Jordi Escartin had experience of the electoral process at various levels. He stood in the regional elections 1989, the cantonal elections at Sigeac 1994 (3% gained), on the list of Régions et Peuples Solidaires in the 1994 European elections, with the label RPS-POc in

the legislative elections, Béziers 1997 (1.66%), and with the support of the Parti Radical de Gauche and the Verts in the cantonal elections, Béziers 1998 (2.53%). He highlighted a significant factor which acted as an initial block to gaining the support of the electorate – the need to devote a vast amount of time and energy to ‘educating’ voters as to the meaning of the word Occitan and the nature of Occitania, before they could be persuaded to support policies in its defence. The majority of voters had at the most a vague idea of it as ‘patois’, or perhaps vague associations with the Cathars. The reasons for this lack of awareness are discussed in Part Three of the thesis. Escartin had found it increasingly frustrating, as he tried to explain his social and economic proposals, to get the response that ‘he wants to defend a non-existent state and a language which no longer exists’ (Escartin Interview June 13 2004). It was a point he emphasized in a Midi Libre interview during the 1994 cantonal election campaign, stating that he was trying to transmit a more accurate image of the Partit Occitan, as throughout the campaign he had found that it was regarded indiscriminately as a cultural association, a separatist movement, or of either right wing or left wing leanings (Midi Libre March 24 1994). An account in Midi Libre of Escartin’s electioneering visit to a market during the 1998 cantonal campaign referred to the difficulty of gaining the attention of the shoppers, who claimed ‘that doesn’t interest us’, except where committed Front National supporters provoked bitter arguments (Midi Libre March 10 1998).

Escartin’s response to these problems was to campaign strongly from within the Bureau National, to which he had been elected in 1994, to secure improved methods of publicity for the party during elections. He believed, and still believes strongly, that the party has no possibility of electoral success unless it embarks on a more ‘American’ style of electioneering, with more professional publicity material, greater media awareness, a willingness to devote more time to door-to-door campaigning, and a general promotion of a revitalized image of the party. Failing to gain the financial support of the party for his ideas, he used his own financial resources to produce more sophisticated electioneering leaflets and to organize public meetings, until this issue became one of the contributory factors to his resignation from the party in 1998 (Escartin Interview June 13 2004). The accounts for the legislative elections, 1997, (published in P.Oc. IB 61 July 1998) show that Escartin had expended far more than the other candidates, whilst receiving less than others from other sources. His personal expenditure was more than double that of the others. As

De Winter points out, being an ethnoregionalist party does not in itself presuppose poverty of means, for example the VU Volksunie in Belgium, or the SVP Sudtiroler Volkspartei in Italy, manage, in comparison with their electoral importance, to mobilize more financial resources than their state-wide competitors. As most regionalist parties have not shared in government, they are not in a position to provide the patronage to unions or businesses which might stimulate donations, but they do have a party membership which is strong on ideology, and therefore willing to lend financial support in pursuit of their goals (De Winter 1998: 230). It is clear, however, that the small size of the membership base of the Partit Occitan, and the limitations of its impact on the electorate, so that it does not pass the 5% threshold which enables a refund of some of the electoral expenses, means that every electoral engagement puts a further strain on its limited finances, which come almost entirely from members' subscriptions. (It is also the case that the internal bulletins of both VVAP and the Partit Occitan contain frequent complaints that members were failing to pay their subscriptions on time.) Candidates receive limited funds from a central party electoral fund, but are required to solicit contributions from friends and other individuals, whilst ensuring that the details of these contributions meet the strict requirements of the hexagonal official auditing body (P.Oc.IB 21 April 1990:1)

Ironically, it also appears that an example of electoral success may have a negative effect on the party itself. In Toulouse, a city regarded as being of great strategic significance in building support for Occitanism, a strong local committee declined after Jean Vilotte, its leader and secretary of the party, was elected as the first Partit Occitan Regional Councillor in 1995, on a list with the Verts and Génération Ecologie. A meeting was held with members of the Toulouse section (ten were invited, seven came) to discuss the crisis and to propose solutions to rebuild it, as '*l'engagement de Jean Vilotte ne lui permet pas de faire exclusivement ce travail*'<sup>1</sup>(P.Oc. IB 47 July 1995: 8). This point was elaborated upon by Escartin. He praised Vilotte's commitment and history of active militancy for the party, and his work as Secretary of the party, but pointed out that many of the supporters in Toulouse were both reproaching him for doing less organizational work and at the same time criticizing him for doing insufficient (in their eyes) for Occitanism in his role as

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<sup>1</sup> Vilotte's commitments don't allow him to do this work exclusively

Conseiller Régional (Escartin Interview June 13 2004). Escartin observed that Vilotte should have been replaced as Secretary, to enable him to concentrate on his regional role, but there was no one who could replace him – thus emphasizing again the importance of certain individuals within the party.

As indicated earlier, the European dimension was a significant aspect of the Partit Occitan's political platform. Lynch has pointed out that for small regionalist parties which lack organizational resources there are many advantages to transnational co-operation (Lynch 1998: 191-192). Membership of the European Free Alliance, a grouping of regionalist and nationalist political movements, (now known as the Democratic Party of European Peoples), makes it possible to share resources, and benefit from the experience of larger parties. It acts within a forum which promotes on a wider scale the case for autonomy, or at least the defence of ethnoregionalist political and cultural issues, being instituted at the state level by individual members (Lynch 1998: 192). Lynch comments that the Partit Occitan, along with the Union Démocratique Bretonne and Unitat Catalunya, is among the 'extremely small and insignificant' affiliates, and that a division exists between the small and larger parties in the EFA, nevertheless membership gives it some international validation. In the 1989 European elections the Partit Occitan was represented by Alirol on the list 'Verts- Europe-Ecologie', seconding Max Simeoni, the Corsican regionalist, who was elected to the European Parliament (P.Oc. IB 15 August 1989:7). By the 1994 European elections the Verts were politically divided (Lynch 1998: 194) so the regionalists within France who were involved with the European Free Alliance co-operated to form a common list, led by Simeoni and seconded by Alirol. This list, Régions et Peuples Solidaires, performed badly. Although it gained 10% in Corsica, Simeoni's home, where regionalism was strong, it gained only 0.93% in Brittany and 0.64% in Alsace (Lynch 1996: 170-171). The Partit Occitan's analysis of the performance of the list reveals that in Occitan territory results varied from 0.24% in the Corrèze to 0.69% in Haute Loire (Alirol's home area). They comment that this is only 0.1%-0.2% more than in the other French départements outside the ethnically diverse areas of Brittany, French Catalonia, the French Basque Country, Alsace and Corsica, and conclude that ' le différentiel entre régions occitanes et régions françaises ne peut que traduire la faiblesse de la revendication

occitane'<sup>1</sup>. They attribute the failure in part to the fact that the list was organized so late that it was impossible to prepare adequately. Information from the Partit Occitan secretariat to party members was sent out on 17 May to prepare for the election on 12 June. In that short period they were expected to organize subscriptions, press conferences, tours for Simeoni and Alirol, public meetings and poster campaigns. Insufficient financial resources had limited the nature of the publicity put out, and public opinion had not gained a clear perception of the list (P.Oc. Bilan et Perspectives. Elections européennes. July 1994: 1-2). A document in the latter survey also cited the Journal Officiel de la République Française, which stated that it was not in a position to publish the electoral accounts of the party, as documents transmitted were certified by two people who were not official auditors. (This was not the only election after which the party had to resubmit its accounts, evidence again of the problems experienced by small parties which lack the legal and administrative back-up of major national parties.) Subsequently the party has presented candidates in the legislative elections with the support of Régions et Peuples Solidaires (of which Alirol is president), with its highest score in 1997 being 1.78%. (RPS, which federates organizations and parties representing the minorities within France, campaigns against Parisian centralism.)

By making the electoral arena the focus of its activity, the party leadership and some of the committees have been subjected to criticism from within the membership, on the grounds that 'le tout électoralisme' harms their credibility, drains away finance, and leads to deficiencies at the level of action (P.Oc. IB 43 January 1994:4). Interestingly, both Yves Rouquette and Robert Lafont, when asked to comment on the Partit Occitan, were equally critical of its electoral involvement. Lafont is a member of the party, more out of sympathy with its ideals, but does not actively involve himself in the life of the party. He stated that it has never really had a social mission, and argued that presenting candidates at elections, with extremely poor results, has a negative effect on people. He explained that he has made clear to the leadership that the process is devouring all their energy, with meagre results, and that he believes that a different approach is required to deal with the contemporary political situation, and issues such as globalization (Lafont interview November 4 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> The differential between the Occitan regions and the French regions clearly conveys the weakness of Occitan claims.

Rouquette stated that he is not a member, because it would be ineffective, and that the party 'lacks the troops', so that as it is not up to participating in elections it should not do so (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). What have been the practical results of the electoral involvement, apart from a wider dissemination of their ideas? A small group of party members have held some form of electoral office as mayors, deputy mayors, or *conseillers généraux*, in small communities or rural areas, 'mais trop peu et trop isolés pour influencer sur la société occitane' <sup>1</sup>(Viaule 2003: 53).

#### **4.3.7 The activity of the party**

What type of activity has the Partit Occitan engaged in, in pursuit of its ambition to promote and defend Occitania? It is clear from the internal bulletins and party publications that a great deal of time is taken up by discussion of party policy, and the preparation for elections. At the level of the leadership, individuals devote time to maintaining the links with the EFA and RPS, which includes visits to Brussels and Barcelona. Those who have attained electoral office do, in spite of Viaule's comment, attempt to use their position to defend the Occitan language and culture. Guerrera at Aix used his position as municipal councillor, for example, to set up sessions of initiation to Occitan in primary schools (P.Oc. IB 23 June 1990:2), and others have encouraged the use of bilingual street names. The Bureau National encouraged committees to become involved in local actions, and stated that 'une réflexion doit s'engager pour dégager des thèmes autour de points d'actualité' <sup>2</sup> (P.Oc. IB 53 April 1996: 10). Examples of this type of activity include campaigning against the damage to the environment by the Evenos quarry in Provence, opposition to the development of the Ste. Croix tourist complex by German investors (P.Oc. IB 12 December 1987:7), and support for farmers suffering economically in the Ariège (P.Oc. IB 13 February 1988: 24). The Toulon committee involved itself in the campaign of information against forest fires, and for a renewed policy of development of the forests (P.Oc. IB 27 February 1991). Environmental themes are common. Committees were encouraged to organize or participate in demonstrations. Some of these were more symbolic rather than of real value, and were not always well-received. Occitanists interrupted a concert of the

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<sup>1</sup> But too few and too isolated to have an influence on Occitan society

<sup>2</sup> Thought must be given to singling out themes linked to current events.

Red Army choir in Carcassonne, throwing down showers of tracts in support of people of the Baltic nations invaded by the Red Army, especially Lithuania. 'Le public manifesta son hostilité à cette initiative'<sup>1</sup> (Midi Libre February 16 1991). (During the 1970s the Occitanist movement had frequently tended to support what were perceived as oppressed minorities, such as the Kurds, but the Partit Occitan has been less active in this area.) A protest demonstration of about forty people was organized at the Capitole in Toulouse at the same time as the ashes of Abbé Grégoire, (seen as a symbol of Jacobinism because of his promotion of the French language over regional languages at the time of the French Revolution), were being moved to a place of honour in the Panthéon in Paris. This protest was described as a 'useless event' in the local news report (Journal de Toulouse December 13 1998). Of more significance has been the participation with other organizations in a number of demonstrations against Le Pen and the Front National, e.g. in Aix, Marseilles and Toulon, as part of the Partit Occitan's consistent policy of hostility to racist attitudes towards immigrants.

Throughout its existence the party has cooperated with Occitan cultural groups to defend and promote the Occitan language. An unnamed member of the Lot and Garonne committee justified this to those who argued that the defence of the language was a purely cultural issue:

La lutte pour la langue occitane relève de notre droit de citoyen de parler notre langue, de l'étudier, de l'enseigner, la promouvoir, la voir vivre et se développer dans les arts et la culture mais aussi dans la vie. C'est donc une question politique.

<sup>2</sup> (Occitania 110 March-April 2000: 7.)

Support has taken various forms, for example support by the Languedoc committee for the employees of C.I.D.O. in Béziers when it was under threat in 1993, and campaigns for a new building to hold its collection of Occitan books, documents and audio-visual materials. There has been regular involvement in campaigns to increase the amount of Occitan in the media, particularly on the radio and television, with pressure on the management of FR3, for example demonstrations in Toulouse in support of programmes in Occitan and Catalan

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<sup>1</sup> The public displayed its hostility towards this initiative.

<sup>2</sup> The struggle for the Occitan language concerns our right as citizens to speak our language, to study it, to teach it, to promote it, to see it living and growing in the arts and culture, but also in everyday life. It is therefore a political question.

which were under threat in a restructuration programme (La Dépêche du Midi December 13 1989). Members have also participated in demonstrations by students in Bordeaux, protesting against reductions in the possibility of studying Occitan within the Rectorat of Bordeaux (Occitania 110 March-April 2000: 6). A significant issue has been their involvement in mobilization spearheaded by RPS to persuade the French Government to ratify the European Charter on regional and minority languages, and to annul Article 2 of the French Constitution which lays down that French is the official language of the French State (Occitania 112 July-August 2000:3).

These examples merely give some indication of the activities promoted by, or participated in, by members of the Partit Occitan. Although they may appear to fulfill the Bureau National's plea for mobilization for local actions (P.Oc.IB 53 April 1996:10) the impression gained is that they are rather haphazard and sporadic, an impression which is confirmed by Tautil's conclusion:

L'intervention sur le terrain, en dehors des périodes électorales, reste notre point faible. Elle révèle notre insuffisance organisationnelle, notre faiblesse de recrutement et donc la difficulté qu'il y a à promouvoir des actions à la base.<sup>1</sup> (P.Oc. IB 61 July 1998: 10-11.)

#### **4.3.8 Conclusion**

It is hard to escape the conclusion from this survey of the Partit Occitan that it has been a failure. Of the points of its political programme, based on its 1987 Charter, developed in its advertisement of 2000, and which appears on its current website ([partitoccitan.free.fr/progeng.htm](http://partitoccitan.free.fr/progeng.htm) accessed 20/08/04), none have been attained. It has succeeded neither in extending its membership nor gaining electoral support beyond a minimal level. Even its commitment to Pan-Occitanism and the promotion of unity amongst all those engaged in the Occitanist cause has come up against the localism of certain groups such as Entau País in Béarn, and the divergent political interpretation of Occitanism by a more radical faction, Corrent Revolucionari Occitan (CROC), whose temporary existence is examined below, whilst the Parti Nationaliste Occitan, though small, has continued to promote its extremist views.

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<sup>1</sup> Intervention on the ground, outside electoral periods, remains our weak point. It reveals our organizational inadequacy, the weakness of our recruitment and thus the difficulty in promoting action at the grass roots.



## 4.4 Additional political organizations since 1974

### 4.4.1 Introduction

VVAP and the Partit Occitan have been identified above as the most significant political organizations within the Occitan movement during the period 1974-2000, VVAP through its involvement in the social movement activity in the 1970s (examined in more detail in Chapter 6), and the Partit Occitan through its visibility during some electoral campaigns in the later 1980s and 1990s. During this period other Occitan political organizations also existed. The Parti Nationaliste Occitan, whose origin in 1959 and policies are outlined in Chapter 3.3.5, continued after the death of its founder, Fontan, in 1979. Lutte Occitan survived until 1980. A brief account of their significance will be given. A number of ephemeral groups also emerged during this period. Lavelle in his account of the renewal of political Occitanism after 1987 states that 'on ne peut citer ici des groupements souvent éphémères'<sup>1</sup>(Lavelle 2004: 547). An examination of two such groups is necessary, however, as their existence, even if short-lived, focuses attention on issues which help to explain some of the problems experienced by the Partit Occitan. As explained earlier, the key objectives behind the establishment of the Partit Occitan were, firstly, to gather together all Occitanists, thus ending the factionalism which had contributed to the weaknesses of the Occitan movement in the 1970s, and secondly, as a concomitant to the first, to promote its role as a pan-Occitan organization, representing the whole of Occitan territory, not just the 'Occitan political heartland' of Languedoc and Midi-Pyrénées. The creation of Entau Païs in Béarn (in south-west France) reveals the difficulties of achieving the latter aim, as it highlights the difficulties created by the local particularities of the extended Occitan territory. The establishment of CROC, the Corrent Revolucionari Occitan, illustrates the problems resulting from the emergence of a new younger generation in the 1990s, some of whom challenged the 'status quo' established by the Partit Occitan, and developed theoretical concepts which in some ways harked back to those of Lutte Occitan, and in others had similarities with the PNO. Sources concerning Entau Païs and CROC are limited, and not always accurate<sup>2</sup>. The evolution of Entau Païs has been

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<sup>1</sup> It is not possible to cite here groups which were often ephemeral.

<sup>2</sup> Viaule (2003) is inaccurate in his chronology for both.

established largely from references to it in *Partit Occitan* bulletins, and of CROC from their journal, *Har/Far*.

#### **4.4.2 The Parti Nationaliste Occitan (PNO)**

The PNO never had more than a small number of members, and after the death of its founder François Fontan in 1979 it became even more marginal, even though during the 1990s under its subsequent leader Jacques Ressaire it did adapt some of its policies to make them less extreme. A detailed examination is not made of the PNO here, as it is analyzed fully in existing literature. Formaggio (1976) and Abrate (2001) examine its early development. Lavelle devotes what in some respects is a disproportionate amount of his political and cultural history of Occitania to it (Lavelle 2004: Ch.23), discussing the theoretical contribution of Fontan and the subsequent development of the PNO. He justifies his emphasis on a party which never had more than a few dozen militants, and which had an extreme programme (which not only argued for a separate, independent Occitania, but also advocated the redrawing of a large number of other state boundaries) by the fact that Fontan's ideas were extremely original, and because, (citing Robert Lafont), 'depuis 1959, toute position politique occitane s'est prise en référence – positive ou négative – au PNO' <sup>1</sup>(Lavelle 2004: 495). Lavelle's chapter is valuable as it clarifies a number of issues. The PNO is often described as a right wing organization<sup>2</sup>, but Lavelle however reveals the complexity of the PNO's programme, in particular the influence of Marxism on Fontan's thinking. He concludes that Fontan's doctrine was a nationalism of the extreme left, envisaging a form of socialist régime for an ideal ethnically pure state (Lavelle 2004: 510). Lavelle points out that after Fontan's death international changes such as the collapse of Marxism/Leninism led to some revisions of its positions by the PNO, confirmed in new statutes in 1998 (Lavelle 2004: 511-512). Although Lavelle states that in the economic sphere the PNO had passed from revolution to reformism, proposing a system of mixed economy rather than centralized planning, it is clear from the the new statutes that the fundamental aim of the party remained complete independence for Occitania.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1959 every Occitan political stance has been taken with reference –positive or negative–to the PNO.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. 'the regional chauvinism seen in the right wing Parti Nationaliste Occitan' (Keating 1988: 206)

Son objectif primordial est la réalisation de l'indépendance politique, économique et culturelle de l'Occitanie, dans ses limites ethno-linguistiques...<sup>1</sup> (Lo Lugarn 64 Summer 1998: 6)

It is its role as catalyst and reference point of political Occitanism, referred to by Lafont, which gives the PNO continuing significance. Viaule, one of the most committed militants of the Partit Occitan, and in principle opponent of the PNO, provides a useful commentary on its importance. He states that though nominally a political party (presenting at very few elections), it functions rather as a 'cercle de réflexion politique'<sup>2</sup>, and has virtually no popular audience. It does however have an audience within the Occitan movement, because it forces every militant for the Occitan cause to position him/herself with regard to it and its programme. Viaule goes as far as to say:

Il est indéniable que si le PNO n'avait pas existé, le mouvement politique occitan ne serait pas ce qu'il est aujourd'hui, et peut-être n'existerait-il pas. En effet plusieurs mouvements politiques sont nés en réaction, ou par rapport au PNO,<sup>3</sup> (Viaule 2003: 24).

It is possible to cite a number of examples of the influence of the PNO on those outside the party. Rouquette was accused of being sympathetic to the PNO's views, in the 1960s, and particularly during the later 1970s when Lafont's supporters accused him of moving VVAP towards the nationalist views of the PNO. Rouquette admits the impact on him of Fontan's argument that Occitania was a nation with the right to a separate destiny, but states that other aspects of Fontan's philosophy were alien to him, including his Marxism, and the PNO's proposals in favour of a particular and rather esoteric form of the spelling and vocabulary of the Occitan language (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). A more recent example of the PNO's influence is that of Domergue Sumien. As a member of the Bureau National of the Partit Occitan, he made extensive suggestions for amendments to its programme (P.Oc. IB 38 August 1993). Although he argued in favour of an autonomous community of Occitania, made up of autonomous regions within Occitania, each with their own assembly, legislature and executive (p.16), and stated that 'mais oui!

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<sup>1</sup> Its chief objective is the achievement of the political, economic and cultural independence of Occitania, within its ethno-linguistic limits.

<sup>2</sup> A political think tank.

<sup>3</sup> It is undeniable that if the PNO hadn't existed, the Occitan political movement would not be what it is today, and perhaps would not have existed at all. Indeed several political movements have been born in reaction against, or in relation to the PNO.

C'est bien un amendement indépendantiste', he was emphatic 'qu'on ne me brandisse pas l'épouvantail du PNO'<sup>1</sup>. He explained that the PNO wished to create a rigid and all-powerful state, whereas he was proposing the abolition of all states within a Europe of the peoples, thus his proposal was pro-European, unlike that of the PNO ( P.Oc. IB 38 August 1993: 28). By 1995 Sumien had resigned from the Partit Occitan and set up the Corrent Revolucionari Occitan (CROC)<sup>2</sup>. In 1998 he referred in *Har/Far*, the journal of CROC, to 'les mouvements politiques auxquels j'adhère, le CROC et le PNO'<sup>3</sup> (Sumien *Har/Far* Supplement to 9 June 1998: 2). By 1999, in an article on the twentieth anniversary of the death of Fontan, he was again critical of the PNO, stating that since the death of Fontan the party had become centrist, neglecting the class struggle and the fight for sexual emancipation in favour of a rigid focus on its 'ethnist'<sup>4</sup> aspects. Nevertheless, dialogue with the PNO should continue (*Har/Far* 12 1999: 13). Sumien is in regular correspondence with Lafont (some of which is published in *Har/Far* Supplement to 9 June 1998), who states that he feels sympathy for Sumien's commitment to Occitanism, but is critical of the fact that he has taken up nationalist slogans (Lafont Interview November 4 2003). Sumien provides an illustration of the view that all Occitan militants must position themselves in relation to the PNO. In his case he appears to revise continually that position as his own political ideas evolve.

The Partit Occitan was not, during the 1990s, willing to work with the PNO in electoral alliances. A report on the meeting of the Bureau National in April 1991 explained the reasons why it was impossible to consider an alliance with the PNO for the regional and cantonal elections of 1992. The PNO's extreme anti-Europeanism, which had led it to declare solidarity with certain French parties of the right, and its practice of promoting division amongst Occitanists, for example by encouraging the establishment of a 'provençaliste' party, are cited as divergences too strong to enable even an 'oecuménisme de circonstance'<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the narrowness of its 'ethnist' interpretation of Occitan society,

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<sup>1</sup> Yes it is an independentist amendment – but don't let anyone wave the bogeyman of the PNO at me.

<sup>2</sup> Discussed below 4.4.5

<sup>3</sup> the political groups which I belong to, CROC and the PNO

<sup>4</sup> There is no exact translation for the words 'ethnisme' and 'ethniste' which were invented by Fontan to describe his theory on the division of humanity according to 'ethnies', groups associated on linguistic, racial and territorial lines.

<sup>5</sup> Unity based on convenience.

which opposed all mixing of populations, is cited as a continuing problem (P.Oc. IB 29 May 1991: 2). In 1998 Tautil wrote that the Partit Occitan debate with the PNO was 'inexistent', for reasons similar to those stated above, and stated that in spite of the 1998 revisions to the PNO's programme, particularly its less hostile attitude to Europe, it was still unacceptable ( P.Oc. IB 61 July 1998: 12-13).

An article in the PNO's journal, *Lo Lugarn* in 2001 gave an assessment of the state of the Occitan movement at that time:

Le PNO, peu présent comme tel dans la vie publique, n'arrive pas facilement à assumer l'héritage de François Fontan et à l'adapter aux temps nouveaux....Les dirigeants 'historiques' sont usés et la relève tarde à venir<sup>1</sup>.  
( Hilaire 2001)

It is clear that during its continued existence though the PNO has played an important role in the theoretical development of Occitanism, the complexity and extremism of its arguments have meant that it has never secured any hold on the Occitan population. It has participated in few elections, gaining from two to three per cent of the vote in some cantonal elections in the mid 1980s (Chartier and Larvor 2004: 294).

#### **4.4.3 Lutte Occitane**

The circumstances of the establishment of Lutte Occitane in 1971 have been described in Chapter 3.3.5. It existed, in a weakened form after 1974, until 1980<sup>2</sup>, at which point it was visible largely in the form of a diminished version of its journal, *Pais Occitan Lutte Occitane*. There is a strong case for stating that its main significance was in the period up until 1974, when it was superseded by VVAP as the most influential Occitan political organization. Its creation was an Occitan response to the post 1968 ambience in France, a fact reflected in its early membership, composed of 'toutes les nuances de la gauche révolutionnaire: maoïstes, trotskystes, anarchistes, avec des syndicalistes paysans et

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<sup>1</sup> The PNO, hardly present as such in public life, is not managing easily to take on the heritage of Fontan, and to adapt it to current times...The 'historic' leaders are worn out and the new guard slow to arrive.

<sup>2</sup> Lavelle incorrectly gives the dates as 1968-1974, and, surprisingly, devotes only one paragraph to Lutte Occitane (Lavelle 2004: 532).

quelques syndicalistes ouvriers'<sup>1</sup> (Lafont 1974: 308). Its aims were to destroy the French state, seen as the instrument of both national and international capitalism, and to promote the right of Occitans to live and work within their own area. The 'class warfare' aspect of Lutte Occitane's programme was quite explicit:

Nous refusons que l'émancipation des masses populaires d'Occitanie soit coupée du déroulement de la lutte des classes dans le reste de l'hexagone. Notre libération est solidaire de l'ouvrier de Boulogne-Billancourt<sup>2</sup>.  
(Texte d'orientation of Lutte Occitane, cited in Bazalgues 1973: 167)

Martel points out that Lutte Occitane was set up at a point in the aftermath of May 1968 when it still seemed possible to build outside traditional political parties an alternative revolutionary force, capable of acting on the margins of the system, by harnessing the discontent of workers and young people with the system. He argues that this opening was closed once the Common Programme of the Left was established in 1972, marking a return to the offensive by the Parti Socialiste and the Parti Communiste Français, and meaning that Lutte Occitane's potential for success was inhibited only a year after its creation (Martel 1989: 13).

Although Bazalgues (responsible for the journal of Lutte Occitane) stated that Lutte Occitane had established itself throughout Occitania, and amongst Occitan immigrants in Paris, Lyon and Grenoble<sup>3</sup> (Bazalgues 1973: 160), members of the PNO argued that it was confined largely to the Hérault, Aude and Tarn areas, which encouraged a Languedocian chauvinism harmful to the development of a national consciousness in the rest of the Occitan territory (Averous 1972: 67). It did bring together a number of the leading Occitanists of the 1960s, including Lafont. Although Viaule claims (Viaule 2003:33), and Lavelle repeats (Lavelle 2004: 532), that Rouquette also joined Lutte Occitane, Rouquette denies this<sup>4</sup>, stating that he was opposed to Marxism, and in particular to what he called

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<sup>1</sup> All shades of the revolutionary left were found: maoists, trotskyists, anarchists, with some members of agricultural unions and some industrial unionists.

<sup>2</sup> We refuse to accept that the emancipation of the popular masses in Occitania should be cut off from the course of the class struggle in the rest of France. In our quest for liberation we stand together with the workers at Boulogne-Billancourt.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, in the light of the later development of Entau Pais (see below), he states that difficulties existed in finding a foothold in Gascony, because of the specific Gascon sense of identity, which must be respected.

<sup>4</sup> This is corroborated by Lafont (Lafont 1974: footnote 96 p. 309).

Lutte Occitane's 'Marxisme de salon' (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). This is a significant point, as it marks the point at which the divergences between Lafont and Rouquette became more explicit.

What did Lutte Occitane achieve at a practical level? It played a major role in the initial stages of the Larzac protest, and gave support to the viticulteurs' campaign (see Chapter 6), but in both areas its influence declined after the establishment of VVAP. The 'gauchisme', or extreme leftism, of Lutte Occitane made its members suspect in the eyes of many of the rural communities involved, and they were regarded as alien in their social values (Comités d'Action Viticoles 1976: 237). Proposals for the training of militants include a reading list of Gramsci, Mao, Marx and Wilhelm Reich (Lutte Occitane IB19 April 17 1975: 20) and pages of abstract political theorizing. Quéré concluded that the evolution of Lutte Occitane was dominated by such theorizing, and that it consisted of little more than a title and a debating chamber (Quéré 1978: 194-195). Formaggio in his thesis on contemporary political Occitanism presented in 1976 stated that at the time of writing there were several hundred active militants (Formaggio 1976:136), but by the time of the abortive attempt to unite Lutte Occitane and VVAP in 1979 there were only 100 mandates for Lutte Occitane (Martel 1989:13), and it had disappeared by 1980. Touraine concluded that 'Lutte Occitane n'a pas eu d'influence politique, n'a rien créé d'autre qu'un discours, une rhétorique même'<sup>1</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 271).

#### **4.4.4 Entau País**

One of the problems experienced by the Partit Occitan in its efforts to create a pan-Occitan organization over the vast extent of Occitan territory, as defined by linguistic markers, has been the fact that Occitanists in some areas with a marked regional identity have resented this, perceiving it as a form of 'imperialism'. This is particularly true of the area of South-West France known historically as Gascony, and the sub-region of Béarn near the Pyrénées, centred on Pau. This separate identity is based on historical and linguistic factors, which are discussed more fully in Chapter 7. The creation of a political group, known as Entau

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<sup>1</sup> Lutte Occitane did not have any political influence, created nothing apart from a discourse, a rhetoric even.

Païs, in Béarn illustrates the intransigence of the resistance to the Partit Occitan's claims to represent the whole of Occitania.

It is perhaps possible to find the origins, or at least the antecedents, of Entau Païs in 1983. An internal bulletin of VVAP (August 1983: 5-7) includes a letter from the Béarn committee of VVAP, stating that in the previous couple of years it had become a 'ghost committee' of four or five members. It was proposed to re-launch the committee, addressing some of the issues which it was felt had contributed to its decline. They believed that they had become separated from the Occitan cultural groups in Béarn, and that although they were aware of the specificity of the situation in the region, they had no impact on the political, social or economic life of the Béarnais, and felt that in the past far too much time had been spent theorizing about the situation of Occitania as a whole, as a colonized nation. At the same time the Occitan cultural groups in Béarn were marginalised because of the differences between the Gascon dialect and the other dialects of Occitan, leading to a perception by the Béarnais that Occitanism was 'un impérialisme culturel étranger'<sup>1</sup> ( VVAP IB August 1983: 6). They argued that because of the enforced pan-Occitan dialectic they were better prepared to discuss the economic situation in Languedoc, or in a vague way in the whole of Occitania, than to discuss what was happening in Béarn. Disillusionment had led to militants abandoning the cause. Recently, however, a number of groups, including the Félibrige and the remnants of VVAP, had instituted a dialogue, and formed a 'collectif béarnais' which had launched a campaign in Béarn for 'un statut pour notre langue'<sup>2</sup> ( VVAP IB August 1983: 7), whilst the VVAP committee envisaged establishing action 'en fonction des situations telles qu'elles se présentent en Béarn'<sup>3</sup>, rather than trying to apply a global pan-Occitan ideology to the situation there. It was suggested that the VVAP committee in Béarn should have a new title which would indicate its Béarnais specificity, even though it would maintain coordination at the national level. It seems probable that this group was at the origin of Entau Païs. Although Viaule states that Entau Païs was set up in order to participate in the 1992 regional and cantonal elections (Viaule 2003: 46), Jeanjean, who attended the 1986 meeting at Toulouse to discuss the

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign cultural imperialism.

<sup>2</sup> Statutory recognition for our language.

<sup>3</sup> According to the situations specific to Béarn.



formation of the Partit Occitan, refers to the negative reaction towards the representatives from Béarn (Jeanjean 1992: 122), and states that 'le groupe béarnais Entau Païs' refused from 1987 to merge with other Occitan groups in the new party (Jeanjean 1992: 161). In the 1989 Municipal elections a joint list of Entau Païs and the Verts attained a 'surprising' 16.68% of the vote at the first round, in Orthez, and 10.63% at the second round (Sud-Ouest 14/3/89, reproduced in P.Oc. IB 13 April 1989).

Subsequently from time to time references to Entau Païs appear in the bulletins of the Partit Occitan, making it possible to identify the issues which divided them, and the problems created by the Béarnais group's intransigent attitude towards pan-Occitanism. At the October 1989 congress of the Partit Occitan the Carcassonne committee proposed a motion hoping that a rapprochement could be established with Entau Païs whilst respecting their autonomy of action (Jeanjean 1992: 162), but by February 1990 the coexistence of this separate organization was creating practical problems. Entau Païs demanded to have separate representation in any future ALE-France, a grouping representing all the French national minorities within the Alliance Libre Européenne, in contravention of the principle that there should be only one representative per 'people'. Urroz stated that there were no major differences between Entau Païs and the Partit Occitan, but that the former had chosen by its refusal to join the Partit Occitan 'de se cantonner dans une aire géographique délimitée par un particularisme ( que nous respectons) mais qui, pour nous, ne suffit pas pour se donner de bonnes raisons de ne pas s'inscrire dans la démarche occitaniste du Partit Occitan'<sup>1</sup>(P.Oc. IB 21 April 1990:2). Later a similar problem occurred, with Entau Païs taking the initiative to send a representative to CONSEO, the Conférence de Nations sans Etat d'Europe Occidentale, thus sidestepping the Partit Occitan's responsibility to choose the composition of the Occitan delegation. Although this issue was settled by a diplomatic decision to give Entau Païs the status of an invited guest, the internal bulletin notes that 'il est dommage qu'un conflit interne nous sape à l'heure où l'occitanisme repart sur de bonnes bases'<sup>2</sup> and advocates a meeting with Entau Païs to discuss the differences which had built up since 1987 ( P.Oc. IB 24 July 1990: 1). At the 1992 regional elections Entau

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<sup>1</sup> To confine themselves to a geographical area delimited by a specific character ( which we respect) but which, for us , is not sufficient reason to not subscribe to the Occitanist approach of the Partit Occitan.

<sup>2</sup> It is a shame that an internal conflict should undermine us just when Occitanism is getting going again.

Païs proposed to present candidates in Béarn, in the départements of Pyrénées-Atlantiques and Hautes Pyrénées, and planned to discuss an alliance with the Basque parties (Tribune June 1991: 21, reproduced in P.Oc. IB 30 July 1991). The alliance fell through (see below), and Entau Païs gained only about 1% of the vote (Har/Far 0 May 1995: 3).

In 1994 the question of creating a federation of Occitan organizations was raised, but as Tautil pointed out, after a year of discussions with Entau Païs, the Béarnais group withdrew, even though ‘la stratégie était en tous points semblables à celle du P.Oc. (la charte d’Entau Païs et celle du P.Oc. sont toujours la même et commune charte)’<sup>1</sup> (P.Oc. IB 46 December 1994:9). In August 1996 a meeting was held at Pau, with David Grosclaude, leader of Entau Païs, and Alirol present. According to the report in its internal bulletin, a friendly discussion took place, with the Partit Occitan group trying to persuade the representatives of Entau Païs of the need to move towards a unitary movement, ‘parce que c’est un besoin vital...pour plus d’efficacité, de lisibilité et de crédibilité’<sup>2</sup>. It emerged, however, that Entau Païs was ‘une organisation en sommeil’<sup>3</sup>, and was not in a position to make any commitments (P.Oc. IB 55 September 1996: 1). This seems to mark the point at which Entau Païs disappeared as a political organization (Viaule 2003: 10), although in the previous year the group known as Anaram au Patac had described itself as ‘the only Occitanist political organization in Béarn’ (Har/Far 0 May 1995: 3). It appears that not only had Entau Païs faced the opposition of the Partit Occitan, its programme was unacceptable to a group of younger Occitan militants who set up a rival organization in 1992, Anaram au Patac, which became a founding part of CROC in 1995.

In an introductory edition of Har/Far, which became the journal of CROC, it is stated that Anaram au Patac was set up in the context of the 1992 regional elections, when Entau Païs presented a list in Midi-Pyrénées. Although Entau Païs wanted to be considered the sole representative of the Béarnais Occitanists, its approach was criticized by some. Firstly, it was claimed that though Entau Païs presented itself as a regionalist group, some of its members in private expressed nationalist views. Secondly, the authors also claimed that

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<sup>1</sup> Its strategy was in all respects similar to that of P.Oc. (they still share the same charter)

<sup>2</sup> Because it is a vital necessity, for greater efficiency, clarity and credibility.

<sup>3</sup> An organization which was in abeyance at the time.

Entau Païs refused to position itself firmly on the political left, and had proposed an electoral alliance with a right wing Basque party, Eusko Alkartasuna (although not condoning the use of violence). The unnamed author of the article claims that the proposed alliance fell through because of the leader of Entau Païs's 'ludicrous' desire to head such a list, given the respective weights of the two organization in the area (Har/Far 0 May 1995:2 and footnote 3,3). The article goes on to state that those Occitanists in Béarn who had refused to join Entau Païs noted that its electoral results in 1992 were barely above 1%, that 'après vingt-cinq ans d'occitanisme en Béarn, le drapeau occitan était à peu près aussi inconnu que celui du Swaziland'<sup>1</sup>, and that no specifically Occitanist solutions had been proposed for the problems of the Béarn population (Har/Far 0 May 1995: 3). In spite of its apparent lack of impact, the existence of Entau Païs meant that, as Viaule points out, 'le Partit Occitan a eu toutes les peines du monde pour s'implanter en Béarn'<sup>2</sup>(Viaule 2003: 46). Viaule states that the localism of Entau Païs was particularly strong, in that it preferred to dissolve itself in 1996 rather than become a regional federation of a national (Occitan) political party (Viaule 2003: 47)<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4.4.5 CROC The Corrent Revolucionari Occitan**

The Corrent Revolucionari Occitan (CROC) existed between 1994<sup>4</sup> and 2002. This group, though small, has significance as it acts not only as a further example of the issue of pan-Occitanism versus localism referred to above, but also raises the issue of generational change within Occitanism during the 1990s, at a period when the key figures within the Partit Occitan were those who had been involved in the Occitan political scene since the 1970s. Lafont, in a correspondence (published in part in a supplement to Har/Far 9 June 1998) with Domergue Sumien, the leading figure of CROC, stated:

Ce que vous me dites de l'éparpillement et de la désunion occitaniste ne m'étonne pas. Je me suis tenu à l'écart des disputes et des hostilités autant que je pouvais, et mon jugement est sévère. Je pense que tous ces gens, qui ont entre 45 et 55 maintenant, sont la lost generation (sic) de l'occitanisme. Ils ont vécu et

<sup>1</sup> After 25 years of Occitanism in Béarn, the Occitan flag was almost as unknown as that of Swaziland.

<sup>2</sup> The Partit Occitan has had real problems in establishing itself in Béarn.

<sup>3</sup> The demise of Entau Païs coincides with the period when Grosclaude was setting up La Setmana, the weekly newspaper in Occitan. It appears that the party was very dependent on his role. He has been described as a difficult personality, who led others to leave the party.

<sup>4</sup> Not 1998 as Viaule states (Viaule 2003: 11)

intérieurisé l'échec de 1981-1984. Ils sont recroquevillés sur une défaite historique qu'ils prolongent dans des positions irresponsables<sup>1</sup>. (Lafont to Sumien 22/6/97)

In 1994 the Partit Occitan had made efforts to rejuvenate its ranks. Escartin, then in his 20s, had been asked to be responsible for attracting a younger membership, and he established a group known as Jeunesse Occitane which began well. He gave this up, however, arguing that the university students he was supposed to encourage to join regarded him as an 'old man' of the Partit Occitan, and that it was better to leave them to organize themselves (Escartin Interview June 13 2004). It was within this university milieu that CROC was set up. Sumien, who resigned from the Partit Occitan in 1994, described its origin. In Spring 1994 a number of students at Aix en Provence university, 'militants écolos, communistes ou libertaires'<sup>2</sup>(Har/Far 1 August 1995: 6) decided, in the face of the immobilism of the traditional Occitan movement, to launch a new form of Occitanism, which would be more in line with the activities of the Basques or Catalans. CROC was soon joined by a number of other alternative groups in the Aix- Marseille area, with the aim of addressing social and ecological issues. In 1995 it was joined by other young alternative groups such as Anaram au Patac in Béarn, Les Amics de Mesclum in Provence, and the Patriotas Occitans in the Toulouse area. The latter were described as militants who had turned their backs on those within the Partit Occitan who 'se complaisent dans l'inactivité et la routine'<sup>3</sup>(Har/Far 0 May 1995:3). Sumien stated that the aim was to create a network representing 'une nouvelle génération d'occitanisme'<sup>4</sup>(Har/Far 1 August 1995: 6).

Viaule describes the strategy of CROC as revolutionary, separatist, and strongly influenced by libertarian ideology (Viaule 2003: 50). Their manifesto stated that they wanted complete political, cultural and economic liberation for Occitania, and that independence was the sole means of guaranteeing equality for the Occitan culture. They argued for a federal, decentralized structure for a future Occitan state, with communes grouped into

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<sup>1</sup> I am not surprised by what you tell me about the Occitanist disunion and dispersal. I have kept myself apart as much as I could from the disputes and hostilities, and my judgement is severe. I think that all these people, who are between 45 and 55 now, are the lost generation of Occitanism. They have experienced and internalized the failure of 1981-1984. They are huddled up over a historic defeat, which they are prolonging by adopting irresponsible positions.

<sup>2</sup> Militants for environmental issues, communists or libertarians.

<sup>3</sup> Who revel in inactivity and routine.

<sup>4</sup> A new generation of Occitanism.

‘pays’, and then into large autonomous regions. A number of idealistic statements about a tolerant society based on justice and equality, with no discrimination against minorities, are followed by ambitions which have a distinctly ‘soixante-huitard’ feel to them. Whilst advocating direct democracy and autogestion, they are against the power of bureaucracy, the police, the army and technocrats, and describe themselves as anti-capitalist (Har/Far 1 August 1995: 4). Functioning in ‘groupes locaux autonomes les uns des autres, sans aucune hiérarchie, ni nationale, ni à l’intérieur de chaque groupe’<sup>1</sup> (Har/Far 2 November 1995: 3), it is hardly surprising that in spite of local actions of a social or ecological nature, CROC’s impact was limited. By 2002 it had ceased to exist, and Anaram au Patac took over the publication of Har/Far, and decided to focus its efforts solely on Gascony again (Har/Far 22 Spring 2002: 2).

Discussing this ‘new generation of Occitanists’, Tautil stated that many of CROC’s ideas, such as openness to questions about society, and a vision of what Occitan culture could become, were close to those of the Partit Occitan, but that the separatist references ‘take us back thirty years’ (P.Oc. IB 61 July 1998: 13). Although Lafont expressed sympathy with Sumien and CROC in his correspondence published in Har/Far, like Tautil he balked over this issue:

Quand vous pensez à des étiquettes fortes, comme nationalisme, indépendantisme, c’est à vous que vous parlez, pas à la société. La société vous répond à moins de 1% de votes, parce que simplement elle parle un autre langage.<sup>2</sup> (Lafont to Sumien 29/6/97 published in Har/Far 9 June 1998)

Sumien continued to involve himself in efforts to renew the Occitan cultural and political movements after the disbanding of CROC, and maintains an active correspondence with Lafont, who states that Sumien and his colleagues want to start from scratch, reforming the Occitan world as part of a social movement, but are held back by their unacceptable commitment to nationalist slogans. On the wider question of the regeneration of Occitanism amongst a younger generation, Lafont believes that though there are considerable numbers of students of Occitan, the majority are typical of the current young

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<sup>1</sup> Autonomous local groups, without any hierarchy, neither national nor within each group.

<sup>2</sup> When you think about strong labels, like nationalism, separatism, you are talking to yourselves, not to society. Society replies to you with less than 1% of the vote, because simply it is talking a different language.

generation in France, in that they distrust partisan engagement, though a few are attracted to the extreme left, and there are small number of Occitan fascists, who demonstrate with Occitan banners<sup>1</sup> (Lafont Interview November 4 2003).

#### **4.4.6 Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated by examination of some of the ephemeral groups within political Occitanism during the 1990s that the Partit Occitan faced considerable problems in its efforts to create a united face for the movement. Localism, and reversion to ideological concepts which had divided political Occitanism in the 1970s, whether extreme anti-capitalist ideas or separatist aims, can be seen as the result of a failure to transmit a coherent policy acceptable to a younger generation and a wider audience. Factionalism within an ethnoregionalist movement is a common phenomenon, but the extent of Occitan territory placed a particular emphasis on the organizational issue of 'localism' versus 'centralism'. Gabas, a member of the Bureau Fédéral of the Partit Occitan, in his conclusion to Viaule's booklet discusses the decision of the Partit Occitan to maintain its pan-Occitan stance. The Partit Occitan claimed to speak on behalf of the whole of Occitania at the hexagonal level (Régions et Peuples Solidaires), at the European level (Parti Démocratique des Peuples d'Europe-ALE), and within any other institutional groups (Gabas in Viaule 2003: 56). Though the breadth and complexity of the Occitan territory meant that some advocated that political Occitanism should take the form of a loosely confederated collection of local or regional organizations, Gabas argues that the fact that all Occitans are attached to a territory 'sur lequel s'est développé ce qui singularise notre engagement: la langue et la culture occitanes'<sup>2</sup> provides the justification for a unitary organization (Gabas in Viaule 2003: 57). Gabas also argues that the localist organizations usually depend on a small group of individuals, and frequently collapse in the face of a period of difficulties. He concedes, though, that the Partit Occitan is sometimes criticized for being cut off from the real concerns of people, and that localist organizations can be more accessible and closer to the everyday realities of a given territory (Gabas in Viaule 2003: 57-58). He concludes, nevertheless, that individualism and a reluctance to be part of

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 8.4 on the influence of the Front National

<sup>2</sup> In which has developed that which distinguishes our commitment: the Occitan language and culture.

an organization seem to be a traditional weakness of political Occitanism, and that this can only be countered by the integration of local groups into a unitary structure (Gabas in Viaule 2003: 59). It is this issue, as well as fundamental ideological political differences, which has acted as a divisive and weakening factor for political Occitanism.

It has been pointed out that variations in the regional dialects of Occitan contributed to the localism which impeded the creation of a truly Pan-Occitanian political organization. The following chapter examines in more detail factors relating to the Occitan language and its contemporary usage, which have reduced the potential for language, unlike in Brittany or Catalonia, to act as a support for the ethnoregionalist cause.

## Chapter 5 The role of language and culture in the Occitan movement

### 5.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is the evolution of the political wing of the Occitan movement since 1974, and the reasons for its failure to achieve its aims. It is not, therefore, the intention to examine in detail the cultural aspects of the movement, such as the literature and music created during the period, but rather to indicate the ways in which certain factors within what might be termed the Occitan cultural environment have contributed to the problems experienced by the political groups. Keating points out that the word 'culture' can embrace the high culture of intellectuals and artists, but also popular and mass culture, cultural norms which are 'sustained by mass communication'. He states however that language has frequently been the most important aspect of culture in terms of consolidating national identity (Keating 1996: 9-10). It is clear that an examination of the state of the Occitan language during the period under review is relevant to the current study. In May 1968 one of the slogans which appeared in graffiti in Occitania was 'Ome d'Oc as dreit a la paraula. Parla!'<sup>1</sup>. This theme of the right to use, and defence of, the Occitan language was developed and extended in the programmes of all the subsequent Occitan political groups. Although the strength of the linguistic identity of a region is not unanimously accepted as the most significant factor in securing support for ethnoregionalist groups, there is strong evidence that it plays an important role. De Winter cites the work of Hearl, Budge and Peterson, who examined a number of variables contributing to the overall level of voting for ethnoregionalist parties in Western Europe from 1979-1993, and who concluded that 'only the presence of a prevalent or widely spoken regional language, and to a much lesser extent the degree of overall unemployment and of industrial unemployment, emerged as significant determinants of ethnoregionalist voting' (De Winter 1998: 216). An example of this 'positive relationship between the formation of feelings of national/regional identity and the ability to speak the (distinctive) language of that region/nation' is seen in the work of Linz, (cited by Acha Ugarte and Perez- Nieves 1998: 98) who showed that virtually

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<sup>1</sup> Occitanians, you have the right to speak. Speak!



everybody who speaks Basque identifies him/herself as Basque rather than Spanish. In the case of Occitania the language issue is particularly significant, as the boundaries of Occitan territory are defined only by linguistic markers. Unlike, for example, Corsica, which exists as a clearly defined territorial entity, or Brittany which can point to its historical existence as a state separate from France, 'ce qui fait l'Occitanie, c'est d'abord la langue'<sup>1</sup> (Martel 1994: 298).

This chapter firstly examines the situation of the Occitan language since 1974, secondly surveys briefly the role of the Institut d'Etudes Occitanes (IEO) in attempting to reverse the decline in Occitan usage, and thirdly comments on the significance of the Calandretas in promoting the language and as an arm of Occitan militancy.

## **5.2 The Occitan language since 1974**

What therefore is the current state of the Occitan language? What is its likely effect on the prospect of success for political Occitanism? Writing in 1976 Formaggio stated that though Occitania was defined territorially by its linguistic frontiers, 'l'unité linguistique de l'Occitanie est faite par l'usage parlé et écrit de la langue française'<sup>2</sup> (Formaggio 1976: 57). All the evidence suggests that this has been reinforced subsequently, the potential of the Occitan language for creating a sense of regional identity has further declined, and the efforts of militant Occitanists of both the cultural and political wings to stem the decline in usage of the language have had only a limited impact.

What evidence is available to support these statements? The first point to make is that there is no detailed statistical data covering the whole of Occitan territory. Until the 1999 census the French government did not ask questions about the languages spoken in France (Lavelle 2004: 52), so much of the information concerning the period up to that point has to be derived from individual socio-linguistic studies, usually carried out in small clearly defined communities. One such example is the study of a rural community of about five hundred inhabitants, north-east of Toulouse, carried out from the late 1960s through the 1970s

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<sup>1</sup> What makes Occitania, is first of all the language.

<sup>2</sup> The linguistic unity of Occitania consists of the spoken and written usage of the French language.

(Maurand 1981). The most detailed evidence covering a wider area of Occitania comes from studies made in Languedoc-Roussillon in 1991 and 1997. Although the survey organization, Média Pluriel Méditerranée, stated that it was important to remember that the survey was made only in the four Occitan speaking départements of the region of Languedoc-Roussillon, and that 'les résultats ...ne sont en aucune façon transposables à d'autres régions de la zone d'influence occitane'<sup>1</sup> (MPM 1991:1), the general results confirm the key facts concerning age, gender, and economic status of users of the language which emerge from small scale studies elsewhere, such as that described by Maurand, and it does seem reasonable, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to suggest that they are of wider application.

The second point to bear in mind is the fact that there may be a certain level of imprecision in linguistic surveys within Occitania, although that of MPM tried to avoid this by a careful wording of the questions. Those who speak the regional language within Occitania do not necessarily call it Occitan. In Béarn, for example, they might call it Gascon, in Provence, Provençal, while a large number refer to it simply as 'patois' (a provincial dialect) (Lavelle 2004:52). Gardy, in his introduction to the book which produced the commentary on the 1991 survey in Languedoc-Roussillon, highlighted the fact that the Occitan language had never been unified, and thus never made more identifiable. On the contrary, as French spread throughout the southern regions of France, Occitan was increasingly considered as a group of dialects, rather than a single language. This diversity was accompanied by an undermining of the worth of the language (Gardy 1994: 24-25), which led many people to deny their ability to use the language, even when they were able to do so.

Having made these provisos, what do the surveys of the use of Occitan show? Martel, in his foreword to Hammel and Gardy (1994: 9), summarized the conclusions of the 1991 survey succinctly:

Les vieux connaissent mieux la langue que les jeunes, les hommes que les femmes, les départements les plus ruraux la préservent mieux que le littoral urbanisé, on parle davantage, proportionnellement, à Nasbinals qu'à Montpellier; le taux de transmission de la langue baisse au fur à mesure que les générations se succèdent, jusqu'à la situation actuelle où fort peu d'enfants peuvent entendre

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<sup>1</sup> The results can in no way be applied to other regions within the Occitan area of influence

l'occitan dans leur vie familiale. Et les paysans parlent davantage que les cadres dynamiques, et les indigènes sont mieux informés que les nouveaux arrivés<sup>1</sup>.

These conclusions confirm some of those made by Maurand. The Occitan language was linked to the world of agricultural work, and the French language to that of official institutions and urban society (Maurand 1981: 112). French was thus the language of prestige and social advancement, whilst Occitan was considered a social handicap. French was the language of the young, the educated, and of women, who bore the greatest responsibility for the education of the children (Maurand 1981:114). The longer term effects of these factors can be seen from a comparison of the results of the 1991 MPM survey of the use of Occitan in Languedoc-Roussillon with the results of a further survey in 1997, which revealed a decline in the knowledge and practice of the language in the intervening years. In 1991 28% of those questioned said that they could speak Occitan, whereas in 1997 only 19% did so. In 1991 48% claimed that they could understand Occitan, against 34% in 1997. A contrast can be drawn with Corsica, where in 1995 Corsican was understood by 81% of the population and spoken by 64% (Olivesi 1998:178). The Occitan figures are most striking when analyzed on an age basis, with a decline from 6% of 18-24 year olds able to speak Occitan in 1991, to 3% in 1997. The survey into the languages spoken in France carried out in 1999 by INSEE and INED gives some indication of the number of Occitan speakers overall, and makes possible some comparison with the situation of some of the other regional languages in France. Regular speakers of these languages were as follows: Alsatian 548,000: Occitan 526,000: Breton 304,000: Catalan 132,000: Corsican 122,000: Basque 44,000. About 610,000 people had Occitan as a mother tongue, and 1,200,000 as a second language used occasionally. It should be noted that Occitan covers an area of 31 départements, about one third of France, whereas Breton covers only 3, Alsatian 2, Catalan 1, and Basque only half of a département (Lavelle 2004: 52).

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<sup>1</sup> The old know the language better than the young, men better than women, the most rural departments preserve it better than the urbanized littoral, it is spoken more proportionately at Nasbinals (in rural Lozère) than in Montpellier; the rate of transmission of the language is declining as the generations succeed one another, up to the current situation where very few children are able to hear Occitan in their family life. Rural workers speak it more than dynamic executives do, and the native population is better informed about it than the newly arrived are.

The evidence therefore suggests that the attempts by Occitan militants to reverse the trend to decline have met with failure. Hammel noted in his analysis of the 1991 survey that the young adults interviewed (the generation born since 1957) appeared particularly indifferent to the language – aware of its existence, but considering it to be of no relevance to them personally. He noted that this was the generation who had been brought up in the period during or just after the wave of Occitanist influence, when slogans, demonstrations, and some degree of public debate had put the language in the public arena. He concluded:

Il n'est pas évident, en l'état actuel de nos informations que cette donnée ait beaucoup influé sur la transmission de la langue et surtout de la qualité de cette transmission<sup>1</sup>. (Hammel 1994: 56-57.)

The reasons for this lack of impact on a wider Occitan society perhaps become clearer when the difficulties faced by even the most committed Occitanists in promoting the language within their own immediate family environment are considered. Rouquette, who by his militant poetry and prose in the period from 1968 onwards did much to promote the language in contemporary usage, admits that it is not always possible to secure the transmission of the language. Of his two sons, the elder received French as his first language, but Occitan then became the language of the home. At the age of seven, the child asked his parents to speak to him only in French in the future. He however now, as an adult, does speak to his parents in Occitan. The younger son was brought up from the beginning bilingual in Occitan and French, but as an adult no longer uses Occitan. Rouquette comments that some of his contemporaries within the movement did not even use the language at home. For them, Occitan was 'une langue de culture', by implication the 'culture of intellectuals and artists' referred to by Keating (see section 5.1), and not 'une langue de la vie', a language for everyday life (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). The experience of the Escartin family highlights the problems faced by a family currently attempting to transmit Occitan within the home. The decision to bring up their children with Occitan as their first language has led to conflict with the wife's father, who sees it as a retrograde step which will isolate the children. Isabel Escartin states that when talking to her children in Occitan she is often confronted by strangers in the street. Sometimes they

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<sup>1</sup> In the current state of knowledge, there is no evidence that this fact has had much influence on the transmission of the language, and especially on the quality of this transmission.

are merely curious about the language she is using, but on occasions local people who recognize the language are quite aggressively hostile (Escartin family interview June 13 2004).

The fact that students are able to take Occitan in the Baccalauréat has not led to a large scale revival of the language, nor contributed greatly to support for political Occitanism. Between 1976 and 1983 about 9,000 took it as an option each year, but by 2000 the number had fallen to about 2,000, roughly the same as at the end of the 1960s (Lavelle 2004: 61). Even during the period of growth in numbers at the height of the ethnic resurgence in the 1970s there is little evidence of increased Occitan sensibility. VVAP-Languedoc in 1980 conducted interviews with a number of students in Béziers who had chosen Occitan as an option. Only a few of those spoken to displayed any commitment to the Occitan cause. One stated that the majority were interested only in the number of points the exam contributed to their overall score for the Baccalauréat, and ‘le cas général, c’est l’indifférence’<sup>1</sup> (VVAP-Languedoc 25 March 1980: 11). Such students were unlikely to use the language once they left school.

Although the language has gained a certain degree of prominence in recent years as an aspect of the ‘branding’ of regions such as Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées (see Chapter 8.3), with the renaming of street signs, for example, in Occitan, this should not be interpreted as a particularly positive sign. The 1991 MMP survey of Languedoc-Roussillon concluded that regional languages were ‘rapidly dying as functioning media of communication at the same time as they were being reborn as symbolic cultural objects’ (Cohen 2000: 27). Alirol has emphasized this problem, stating that the enormous amount of work carried out by the cultural militants, in the shape of publications, and the setting up of classes, constantly comes up against the question of ‘l’utilité sociale de l’occitan’<sup>2</sup> (Alirol 1999a: 5). He went on to state that this would continue to be a problem until the language was widely recognized as the primary ‘marker’ of a collectively assumed Occitan identity. A contrast can be drawn with Brittany, where many consider the Breton language

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<sup>1</sup> In general they are indifferent.

<sup>2</sup> The social usefulness of Occitan.

as the most important component of Breton identity, even though it is in decline, with only 17% speaking it in 1990 (Parks 2003: 121). Hammel notes the difference between Occitan and other regional languages, where the name of the language, the region and its inhabitants share a recognizable common identity, for example Catalan, Catalonia, Catalans, Welsh, Wales, Welsh, and where the participation in the 'group' is extended to those who may not be able to speak the language (Hammel 1994: 165).

The situation in Wales is particularly instructive, as it highlights a significant factor which differentiates the situation for regional languages in France from that in other countries such as the U.K. or Spain. Although the numbers speaking Welsh may not be high, the language has in recent years received official promotion in the form of the actions of the Welsh Office, which has 'created an economic imperative that makes the language valued sufficiently for people to be motivated to educate their children in Welsh' ( a Welsh Labour councillor, quoted in Parks 2003: 224). Other positive actions such as the Welsh Language Act and the creation of a Welsh television channel S4C have contributed to the creation of a positive image of the language, and to the definition of Welsh identity (Parks 2003: 224). France, on the other hand, has continued to resist the revival of minority languages by reinforcing the constitutional role of French, by the addition in 1992 of Article 2 of the Constitution which states that French is the language of the Republic, and by the failure in 1999 to ratify the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages. By such actions, or lack of actions, the French government has maintained the situation of diglossia, whereby the regional languages are regarded as inferior, and only to be used in certain limited social situations. This situation can be contrasted with that of Spain. Article 3 of the constitution states that Castilian is the official language of the Spanish State, and that all Spanish have the duty to know it, and the right to use it, but that the other languages within Spain will also be official in the respective autonomous communities. It adds that the richness of the different linguistic forms in Spain constitute a cultural heritage which should be the object of special protection and respect (La Setmana 157 June 4 1998). This means that the Occitan territory of the Val d'Aran, in Spain, is the only area where Occitan is recognized as an official language, and where it is compulsory in primary schools (see Chapter 7.6 for further details).

The following conclusions can be drawn from the information available about the situation of the Occitan language. Firstly, it has played a role in the politicization of the Occitan movement. The argument that the imposition of the French language was a form of colonization (Duneton 1978: 215), and that the resurgence and revitalization of the regional language would help bring about a 'décolonisation des esprits'<sup>1</sup> (Duneton 1978: 292) motivated the Occitanists in their defence of Occitan, and formed an aspect of militant Occitan propaganda. Secondly, the failure to extend widely the use of Occitan as a functioning communicative tool, as a result of the repressive attitude of French governments to regional languages, and more particularly the voluntary renunciation of the language by successive generations who saw the usage of Occitan as a barrier to social mobility, has deprived the Occitanist political movement of the benefits which would derive from an increased sense of regional identity associated with a widely accepted and used regional language.

### **5.3 The Institut d'Etudes Occitanes (IEO)**

Although the IEO is a largely cultural organization, consideration needs to be given to its contribution to the political aims of the Occitan movement since 1974. The IEO led the post-war Occitan renaissance, and (as described in Chapter 3.3.4) began its life in 1945<sup>2</sup> as a purely cultural organization, seeking to distance itself from the association of some regionalists with the Vichy régime during the Second World War. Martel states that as the cultural movement pre-existed the political Occitan movement, which historically derived from it, it is possible to suggest that the slide to the political constitutes the continuation of the cultural fight by other means, and he cites the militant song and theatre groups of post 1968 Occitanism as an example (Martel 1989: 15). The IEO has played a leading role in the promotion of Occitan language and culture, contributed in the 1960s to the politicization of Occitanism, and yet also, in the 1970s, eventually acted as a focal point and catalyst of the cleavages existing within the wider Occitan movement.

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<sup>1</sup> A decolonization of minds

<sup>2</sup> Not, as Keating states, in 1949 (Keating 1986: 28 and 1988: 203).

Martel suggests that the IEO had problems right from its origins, when it began as a learned society, with statutes which favoured its critical vocation and its relationship to the university milieu (Martel 1989:16). It had three main functions. Firstly, literary- almost all of the Occitanists were writers, so the literary function seemed to them an indispensable element of the affirmation and legitimation of the existence of Occitania, which was defined by its language (Abrate 2001:436). Secondly it had a scientific function, to promote research, for example into linguistic matters. Thirdly, it had an educational function, to transmit this knowledge, via publications and courses (Abrate 2001: 438). In the 1950s there were repeated crises over the desire of the younger generation, including Lafont, to move the IEO towards reflexion on the Occitan economy, and an increasingly political perspective. Political and personal differences within the narrow group of leaders exacerbated the conflict (Martel 1989: 16). Post 1968 there was serious rupture, as a younger, more politicized Occitanist generation argued for more direct action. In 1972 a report, 'Décoloniser les études' stated that the IEO should provide the theoretical arms for the Occitan movement as a whole, and should encourage a new style of member, in local groups which could organize militancy of a type which would not necessarily lead to theoretical or literary publications, like those which formerly gave access to the prestigious Conseil d'Etudes. This led to a gap appearing between the two types of members, those in the local groups and those in the Conseil d'Etudes (Martel 1989: 16). Lavelle has stressed the way in which the perception of the IEO as an intellectual, élitist organization, with its recruitment within the university environment and among teachers, created problems (Lavelle 2004: 479). The desire for a widening of the remit of the IEO became focalized around the key figure of Yves Rouquette (secrétaire général of the IEO between 1976 and 1978), who advocated that the IEO should become 'un service d'occitanisation de masse et une organisation populaire'<sup>1</sup> (VVAP-Languedoc 10 November 1978: 4). This conflicted with the views of Lafont, and within the IEO the two continued the conflict which was becoming apparent in their interpretation of the political aims of Occitanism (see Chapter 9). Martel has described the public and vitriolic confrontation between these two, and their respective supporters, who effectively formed rival factions, at the General Assembly of the IEO at Aurillac in 1980. Rouquette, who led what became the majority in the vote, saw the

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<sup>1</sup> A means of Occitanizing the masses, and a mass organization.



‘Alternative’ faction, led by Lafont, as a coterie, a sort of ‘Trojan horse’ representing French political parties, particularly the PCF, a group of intellectuals cut off from work on the ground. Lafont’s supporters, on the other hand, were severely critical of the radicalized discourse of a more nationalist type promoted by Rouquette, and of what they perceived as, to use current slang to express accurately their views, the ‘dumbing down’ of the IEO (Martel 1989: 17). In response to their defeat, Lafont and his supporters withdrew in order to ‘retourner s’enfermer dans leur tour d’ivoire’<sup>1</sup>, as Jeanjean was told by opponents of Lafont (Jeanjean 1995: 97). Their withdrawal led to a decline in the activity and number of members of the IEO during the 1980s, with fewer publications, conferences and summer schools (Lavelle 2004: 535).

Jeanjean draws attention to the fact that the association of the IEO with the university milieu had both a positive and a negative impact. It had given the organization a certain legitimization abroad in intellectual circles, therefore gaining a wider audience for Occitanist ideas. Its linguistic research had enabled the phenomenon of diglossia to be better understood, and contributed to a better understanding of the Occitan language and culture, and the negating of the concept of patois. On the other hand, by the overly scholarly and pedagogical attitude of some of its members it reinforced the gulf which existed between those sections of society which were naturally Occitan speaking (and which were largely exterior to Occitanism, and considered themselves French), and those who were working for a renewal of the language, within a political context (Jeanjean 1995: 97). In addition Jeanjean notes that the IEO represented an additional arena for the criticism within the Occitan movement that a ‘Languedocian imperialism’ existed (discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7). Lafont, based in Montpellier, and Rouquette, based in Béziers, dominated the movement until 1980. The normalization of the language which the IEO sought to impose was based on the Languedocian dialect, and Gascon, for example, was regarded as inferior by some members. The IEO had from its inception opposed the use of the Mistralian form of the language, which many of the Provençalists wished to maintain (Jeanjean 1995: 98).

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<sup>1</sup> Go back and shut themselves up in their ivory tower

The example of the IEO confirms the fact that it is impossible to separate entirely the cultural from the political when examining the Occitan movement. The organization did much to promote the Occitan language, which was one of the aims of the political groups, which based their programmes for a recognition of Occitania on the premise that the territory referred to was that where the language exists, or existed. The fact that the membership of the IEO was made up of many who were active in the political groups meant that cleavages within those groups were brought into the cultural arena. In a booklet published by the IEO in 1981 to mark the first 35 years of its activity the President at that time, Patric Chofrut, acknowledged the difficulties experienced:

L'IEO a toujours été le lieu de fortes empoignades entre gens particulièrement convaincus... Qu'il suffise de dire qu'entre partisans de méthodes Freinet et partisans d'une pédagogie traditionnelle, entre nationalistes et régionalistes, entre membres de partis politiques français et autonomistes occitans, entre universitaires de métier et chercheurs non- professionnels, entre marxistes et non-marxistes, etc, etc, la cohabitation n'a pas été facile.<sup>1</sup> (Chofrut 1981:11)

In spite of these problems, the contribution of the IEO to the Occitanist movement has been a significant one, even though its direct contribution to efforts to attain the wider political objectives has been limited.

#### **5.4 The Calandretas**

A detailed study of the situation of Occitan within the French educational system is not being made in the current programme of research. The topic is covered fairly fully in Jeanjean (Jeanjean 1992 :187-200) and Lavelle (Lavelle 2004: 58-61). The role of the Calandretas is considered here, however, as their development can be seen as a direct continuation of political militancy by alternative means, and their history acts as a further illustration of the difficulties faced by those who wish to revive the language as a functioning means of communication. The Calandretas are the Occitan equivalent of the Iskatolas in the Pays Basque, and the Diwans in Brittany- nursery and primary schools

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<sup>1</sup> The IEO has always been the scene of strong arguments between people who are particularly convinced that they are right... Suffice it to say that between advocates of the Freinet method, and supporters of traditional educational methods, between nationalists and regionalists, between members of French political parties and Occitan autonomists, between academics and non-professional researchers, between Marxists and non-Marxists, etc, etc, cohabitation has not been easy.

where the education is delivered in the regional language. The first was established at Pau in 1979, shortly followed by Béziers. By 1999 32 existed, educating 1,438 students (Cohen 2000: footnote to p.48). The earliest ones were set up by committed Occitanist militants, some of whom after the decline in Occitan political militancy in the later 1970s turned towards this project as a means of promoting the growth of the language. One example was the case of René Zerby, the former manager of Ventadorn, the Occitan music distribution company, who helped to initiate the Calandreta at Béziers. This started with five pupils, including his daughter, and gradually grew. His daughter and son-in-law are now teachers at the school (Zerby, R. Interview November 6 2003). Rouquette has argued that for him the object of the Calandretas was to provide a means of gaining access to the parents, as a means of politicizing them, but that often the parents were not sufficiently involved. He also spoke of his personal experiences of visits to Calandretas, where he was sometimes very disillusioned to find that not only did the children speak French in the schoolyard, but that the teachers also spoke French to the children, rather than the total linguistic immersion which he saw as the only successful method (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). Personal experience at the summer Festa (fête) of the Béziers Calandreta confirmed these reservations. Although each class presented a play or song in Occitan, when involved in the social activities, games and meal, the children did not speak to each other in Occitan. With very few exceptions (the Escartin family was one) the parents, who had made the commitment to take their children out of the standard French educational system, did not speak to each other or to the children in Occitan (Festa of the Calandreta of Béziers June 13 2004). Jeanjean noted that by 1990 the Calandretas were attracting an increasing number of parents who were neither Occitan speaking nor originating in Occitan territory (Jeanjean 1992: 198). Lavelle states that the majority of the students in the Calandretas are the children of higher level managers or people in the liberal professions, either urban or 'néo-ruraux' (Lavelle 2004: 60). As Cohen emphasizes, it is not necessarily regionalist ideology which persuades parents to send their children to the Calandretas, but rather the attraction of the smaller class sizes, (a maximum of fifteen students per class), and innovative educational methods such as those of Freinet which give greater autonomy to the individual child (Cohen 2000: footnote to p.48, and Lavelle 2004: 60). For some of these social classes, if they do choose for their children to learn Occitan, it is seen as rather like offering

music or dance lessons, as a means of personal fulfillment and an affirmation of their social status, and not as a means of commitment to an Occitanist cause (Hammel 1994: 45<sup>1</sup>).

Given the small number of children involved, the limited geographical distribution of the Calandretas, their financial constraints, the problems of finding appropriately qualified staff, (capable, for example, of teaching maths in Occitan) and the apparent subversion of their original aims by many of the parents, it appears that their role in counteracting the decline of the language referred to in section 5.2 is symbolic rather than real.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

As Keating states, a common language may be an important element in the fostering of civic community, political equality, and mass participation (Keating 1996: 10). Although the Occitanists from within both the predominantly cultural wing and the predominantly political wing of the Occitan movement have worked to turn the Occitan language into a more widely accessible source of identification for the population of Occitania, they have failed to reverse the decline in its usage. It is the French language which successive French governments have used as ‘cultural icon, tool for social cohesion,’ and which has ‘long stood at the heart of definitions of citizenship, of society, and of the nation’ (Cohen 2000:21). Where aspects of Occitan culture are now accepted, they have not been accompanied by a concurrent politicization of opinions. Hammel, who until 1998 was in charge of Occitan and Catalan culture at the Conseil Régional of Languedoc-Roussillon, argued in 2000 that a conflict existed between culture and politics. He stated that the Occitan culture is a factor of social agreement, whilst Occitan politics, and everything to do with ideas of autonomy or independence is a factor of social conflict (Interview with Hammel in *La Setmana* 263 June 29 2000: 6). There is a complex interrelationship between culture and politics in the Occitan movement, and many comments in the documentation of the movement identify the failure to integrate the two satisfactorily as a significant factor in the difficulties of the movement.

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that Hammel could make this statement indicates some level of success by the Occitanists in changing the image of the language.

There was, however, one period when words and slogans in the Occitan language were employed successfully in the public arena as part of Occitan political activity. As has been pointed out (3.3.5), in the early 1970s the Occitan movement became involved in the campaigns against the extension of the military training ground on the Larzac plateau, and in defence of the Languedocian viticulteurs. The early and mid 1970s subsequently appear as the most successful period for the movement, in terms of its public profile. The following chapter seeks to explain the reasons for this, by examining the way in which Occitanism was for a period able to attach itself to the social movement activity in France in the post 1968 era.

## **Chapter 6 The Occitan movement as part of a social movement**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the view that the political wing of the Occitan movement was able to gain most success, in terms of making an impact on its target population, during the 1970s, when it was able to incorporate its objectives and its activity into social movement activity within the Occitan territory. It is argued that by its methods of mobilization, and of contentious challenge, and certain aspects of its programme, it was compatible with the typology of post 1968 social movement action. It is asserted that although the Occitan movement benefited from this association, examination of the details of its intervention in the Larzac affair and the confrontation between the Languedocian wine producers and the French government reveals that its links were much less profound than contemporary militant literature would suggest. Finally, it is pointed out that the benefits of incorporation into a social movement were not available to it during the second wave of social movement action in France which began in the late 1980s, because of the changed nature of the objectives of that wave.

### **6.2 The links between the Occitan movement and post 1968 social movement activity in France**

Duyvendak defines social movements as ‘a strategically and / or thematically connected series of events, produced in interaction with adversaries and carried out by a coherent network of organizations and participants who use largely unconventional means in attaining political goals’ (Duyvendak 1995: 13). Using this definition, the adversaries in the Larzac affair were the French government and army, and during the viticultural crisis, the French government, the European Community, and to a lesser degree the large capitalist wine companies. Lutte Occitane and VVAP became part of the network of organizations supporting the Larzac proprietors, and the viticulteurs of lower Languedoc. Evidence will be presented of the unconventional methods of promoting their cause. A distinction is sometimes made between so-called old social movements, mobilized on traditional

cleavages such as class, religion and centre-periphery divisions, and new social movements, (NSMs), which are formed around cleavages which are new, e.g. linked to technological developments like nuclear energy, or new in context, such as feminism. Overarching themes tend to be linked to post materialist values, the desire to give greater autonomy to the individual, and to combat the risks of modern society (Duyvendak 1995: 14).

Duyvendak argues that in practice there is no clear cut single difference between old and new social movements. He states that this is particularly true in France where there exists a long history of unconventional action repertoires within for example religious or working class movements (Duyvendak 1995:19). Examining the issue of French regionalist movement activity, he asserts that such movements were not 'new', but that links with NSMs existed during the 1970s, in particular the environmental and peace movements. He cites as an example the role of the Occitan movement which provided a boost to NSM mobilization during the campaign against the enlargement of the military training ground on the Larzac plateau (Duyvendak 1995: 98)<sup>1</sup>. A succinct analysis of the situation is provided by Della Porta and Diani:

Western ethno-national movements of the 1960s and 1970s were often successful in linking traditional themes of peripheral nationalism, such as territory or language, which were previously perceived to be predominantly a conservative issue, with radical anti-establishment perspectives typical of that period. The defence of local culture thus came to be associated with youth counter-culture, in a common reaction to mass culture. At the same time, the defence of territory took on new meanings in the light of the anti-militarist and anti-nuclear struggles of the period, to which was added the aspiration to reduce the control which the politico-military élites of centralized states had of peripheral territories. The critique of the distortion of capitalist development provided a common base for challenges to the economic subordination of 'internal colonies', and for solidarity with third world anti-colonialist movements (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 75).

This analysis expresses well the situation of the Occitan political movement during the early and mid 1970s. The parallels are close with the programmes of both *Lutte Occitane* and VVAP at that time (see Chapter 4.2 and 4.4.3).

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to challenge some of Duyvendak's conclusions about the Occitan movement. His study of NSM activity was based on empirical evidence gathered from newspaper accounts of contentious activity, from which he concluded that the French regionalist movement followed the trajectory of right wing mobilization. He then went on to criticize Touraine's view that the left was especially attractive for political liaisons of the Occitan movement (Duyvendak 1995: 134). In spite of Duyvendak's defence of his methodology (AppendixA 215-219) it is clear that by confining himself to one type of source he has been misled, as all the evidence from the internal bulletins of Occitan political organizations and the personal statements of Occitan militants confirm Touraine's argument.

To what can be attributed the fact that these beneficial links were not maintained over a longer period? The answer lies partly in the fragility of these links, and the complexity of the relationships established. These will be examined later in the chapter. The explanation can also be found, however, in the history of social movement activity in France. Appleton has posited the two-wave theory of NSM action in France. He argues that the first wave, post 1968, incorporated issues such as the student movement, feminism, ecology, anti-nuclear protest and regionalist demands. These promoted 'quality of life' and 'post-material' values, and had faded by the early 1980s. A second wave began in the latter half of the 1980s into the 1990s, this time incorporating what Appleton terms subcultural goals: anti-racism, gay rights, support for AIDS sufferers, and social solidarity (Appleton 2000: 62). Like Duyvendak, Appleton states (Appleton 2000: 72-73) that this change is in part due to the victory of the left in France in 1981, which altered the relationship between the state and civil society, and between the government and social movements, leaving some gaining quick satisfaction, (one might cite here Mitterrand's immediate decision to cancel the plans for the extension of the Larzac military training ground) and others disillusioned (e.g. over the nature of the government's decentralization measures). It can be seen that the synergies produced by the alignment of Occitan objectives and those of the wider social movement in the 1970s were not available during the second wave beginning in the late 1980s. The goals of the second wave were less conducive to a regionalist perspective, although the Partit Occitan has supported anti-racist protests against the attitudes of the Front National within Occitania.

How far does the *modus operandi* of the Occitan movement in the 1970s support the hypothesis that it was part of a social movement? Della Porta and Diani discuss the methods of production of identity and identification rituals typical of social movement activity (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 97-98). The Occitan movement had its 'objects as identifiers', which enable supporters of a particular cause to be instantly recognizable – the Occitan cross, displayed on banners, car stickers, T shirts etc. Characters who have played an important part in the action of a movement or in its ideology can be used as a mobilizing force. This can be a 'negative' mobilizer, as in the case of the use of Simon de Montfort as



a symbol of external intervention in Occitania. Events or places of particular significance can be used to rally supporters. The use of Montségur, site of one of the last stands of the Cathars during the Albigensian Crusade, as a gathering place for Occitan militants during the early 1970s is an example. Della Porta and Diani cite the organizational types specific to social movement activity: a decentralized structure, with many groups, often short-lived, participating episodically in a range of local collective actions (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 140). Occitanist activity in the 1970s fits this paradigm, in the style of their intervention in the Larzac and viticultural campaigns, and it describes how the loose network of VVAP committees functioned (see Chapter 4.2).

Tarrow describes social movements as ‘sequences of contentious politics based on underlying social networks...which develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against political opponents’ (Tarrow 1998: 2). He defines a cycle of contention as:

A phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with a rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors; a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention; the creation of new or transformed action frames; a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified information flow between challengers and authorities. Such widespread contention produces externalities that give challengers at least a temporary advantage and allows them to overcome the weaknesses of their resource base. (Tarrow 1998: 142.)

It is argued here that during the 1970s the Occitan movement benefited from the cycle of contention which developed in France in the aftermath of the events of May 1968, a cycle which corresponds to Appleton’s first wave of new social movement activity (Appleton 2000: 62). It is further argued that the advantages gained were indeed temporary, as close examination of their involvement reveals the fundamental weaknesses in the links established with the other elements in that cycle.

### **6.3 Formaggio’s evaluation of the counter cultural role of the Occitan movement 1976**

In order to support the interpretation of the Occitan movement as an element in a social movement, it is worth referring to the thesis of political sociology presented by Formaggio in 1976. His examination of the political dimensions of the contemporary Occitan movement provides a rare objective academic analysis of the movement at the precise

period which in retrospect appears to have been its most successful in terms of public impact. The main thrust of his argument is that the Occitan movement was aiming not at straightforward political change, but at challenging the French social system. ‘Les analyses occitanistes depuis 1968 s’imprègnent du vocabulaire utilisé par les grands critiques de la société post-industrielle’<sup>1</sup>(Formaggio 1976: 159-160). He argues that the social movement in Occitania has been marked since 1968 with signs of ‘occitanité’, in particular the spontaneous use of the Occitan language in posters, banners and speeches (Formaggio 1976: 463). He saw the use of the language as a statement against the linguistic and cultural conformity of mass consumer society (Formaggio 1976: 170). He lists a number of themes which were popularized since 1970, e.g. the quality of life, the right to be different, the safeguarding of the environment, changes in consumption patterns, the role of women, which were also transmitted by the Occitanists. According to Formaggio they may have recuperated such themes, but went on to create from them a system of new values in opposition to the values of the dominant culture of the French state (Formaggio 1976: 475). He cites as an example VVAP’s proposals for agriculture, industry, energy and employment adopted at their congress in June 1976 (Formaggio 1976: 326). His description of how the Occitan movement functioned conforms to the organizational typology of social movements as described by Della Porta and Diani – ‘le mouvement se présente tantôt comme une nébuleuse de comités et d’initiatives divers et mal liés entr’eux’<sup>2</sup> (Formaggio 1976: 247). In his conclusion Formaggio states that at that point the movement was increasingly making an effort to take root in the social struggles in Occitania, and whilst acknowledging the dangers of prognosticating the outcome in the 1980s or to the end of the twentieth century, he believed that it would continue to undermine the basis of French society (Formaggio 1976:490).

Although with the benefit of hindsight Formaggio’s thesis now perhaps seems over-stated, it is a valuable source as to how the movement was perceived at the time, and confirms the view that the Occitan movement was incorporated into the wave of social movement activity of the 1970s. The two principal examples of such action in Occitania, the Larzac

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<sup>1</sup> Occitanist analyses since 1968 are full of the vocabulary used by the great critics of post-industrial society.

<sup>2</sup> The movement appears sometimes like a vague collection of poorly linked committees and initiatives.

affair and the viticultural crisis, will now be examined to evaluate the nature of Occitanist involvement.

#### **6.4 The Occitan movement and the defence of the Larzac 1971-1981**

The Larzac crisis was initiated in 1971 as a result of the French government's proposed extension to the military training camp on the Larzac plateau in the Aveyron, thereby potentially depriving of their livelihood a number of the sheep farmers who supplied milk to the manufacturers of Roquefort cheese. The protest which subsequently evolved incorporated a complex mix of factors, so that from being the site of a specific conflict, it became a wider cause, with people from other regions in France also becoming 'Larzac militants' (Martin 1987: 18). Formaggio describes Larzac as 'un carrefour d'idées et de luttes'<sup>1</sup> (Formaggio 1976: 219).

A large body of writing exists on the subject of the Larzac affair, and it is not the intention here to give a detailed account, but simply to highlight the contribution made by the Occitan movement, and its significance for the movement. Certainly at the time, and subsequently, the Larzac figured prominently in the Occitanists' own interpretation of their militancy. The books of M. Le Bris, *Les fous de Larzac*, and *Occitanie Volem Viure*, (Chapter 4 Gardarem lo Larzac) emphasize the Occitanist colouring of the protest<sup>2</sup>. In a contemporary academic study Holohan examined the different dimensions of the evolution of the struggle of the Larzac small farmers, and emphasized the ideological role of the Occitanist intelligentsia. She argued that they enabled the peasant movement to abandon its specific local characteristics, and to move towards a strategy of alliance with the regional working classes, at the same time providing it with a whole range of symbolic supports (Holohan 1976: 293).

What practical form did the Occitan involvement take? From the summer of 1971 young militants belonging to maoist groups, and Occitanists, members of Lutte Occitane, gathered on the Causse, with the aim of living and working with the peasants, and promoting resistance against the French state. The Teatra de la Carriera presented militant plays in the

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<sup>1</sup> A forum for ideas and struggles.

<sup>2</sup> Participants still recall with emotion this 'adventure' (Interviews with R. and A. Zerby November 2003).

local villages, and the singer Claude Marti gave recitals, as a means of mobilizing Occitan sentiments (Martin 1987: 35-36). Occitanists adopted Larzac as part of their anti-colonialist cause (Alland and Alland 1994: 33). The slogan 'Volem viure al país' which had appeared for the first time in Occitan tracts distributed at Millau in 1971 became widely distributed, and as a desire for self-determination grew, was extended to 'we want to live, work, and decide in our own region' (Martin 1987: 52). Lutte Occitane helped to organize the 'fête des moissons' in August 1974, which gathered more than 100,000 on the plateau. By this stage however there was increasing influence of the Christian pacifist movement, and solidarity with third world issues (Martin 1987: 60-61). By 1976 more and more 'le Larzac déborde le plateau, et un mouvement social naît qui échappe aux acteurs centraux,'<sup>1</sup> and the Larzac became the 'epicentre' of conflicts around France, such as opposition to the building of nuclear power stations or dams, or workers' struggles elsewhere (Martin 1987: 71-72). Certainly right from the beginning of the crisis the types of militant actions used to promote the cause had conformed to the 'largely unconventional means in attaining political goals' (Duyvendak 1995: 13) typical of social movement action forms. These include the 'tractor march' to Paris, and the grazing of sheep underneath the Eiffel Tower.

The evidence suggests that as the Larzac affair widened its dimensions, the intervention of the Occitan groups diminished after 1975 (Martin 1987: 135), and analysts have questioned the extent of their influence. The small farmers were linked economically to the Roquefort industrialists, which meant that some were less open to the internal colonialist arguments of the Occitanists. Some preferred to marshal their opposition in conjunction with the aid of local notables and union leaders (Alland and Alland 1994:17). The Aveyron region is traditionally staunchly Catholic, and the peasants were increasingly influenced by the arguments for non-violent methods, supported by the Church, and Lanzo del Vasto, the charismatic founder of a local non-violent community, L'Arche (Alland and Alland 1994: 31). The Occitanists, particularly those of Lutte Occitane who were associated in peasant eyes with the maoists, were often regarded with suspicion as being foreign to their social milieu and the region (Holohan 1976: 294-295). Only the most radical of the Larzaciens

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<sup>1</sup> Larzac extended beyond the plateau, and a social movement was born, which eluded the central actors.

were willing to take on board the anti-capitalist content of the Occitan ideology, and many were put off by the intellectualism, and the utopian character of the Occitan claims, and what was seen as the lack of solidity of their political organization (Holohan 1976: 298). In their study of the Larzac social movement, which also observed the subsequent evolution of society on the plateau after the end of the 'affair' in 1981, Alland and Alland confirmed the conclusion that though the Occitanists continued to be a presence throughout the struggle, their role diminished as the protest movement became national in scope (Alland and Alland 1994: 33).

What therefore did the Occitan movement contribute to the Larzac protest? Holohan argues that its promotion of greater prestige for the Occitan language (presented elsewhere as a sign of archaism) and culture, helped to create a positive identity for the small farmers of the Larzac (Holohan 1976:297). The slogan 'Gardarem lo Larzac' (we will keep the Larzac) acted as a rallying cry, and focal point for the various elements who were committed to the defence of the farmers on the plateau (Lagarde 1979: 137). The Occitan discourse also initiated the rural population to political language, and therefore contributed to their radicalization (Martin 1987: 132). Conversely, what did the Larzac affair contribute to the Occitan movement? At the time the militants considered that it was 'the spark which could set fire to the plain' (Le Bris 1974: 291), and would provoke other more widespread resistance in Occitania to other projects of 'government intrusion'. It certainly promoted greater debate among the young in Occitania, and the movement benefited from the enhanced media coverage of the social movement which arose on the plateau. The slogans in Occitan which accompanied events such as the tractor march to Paris brought the language into the public arena. However in the final analysis it seems that the Occitan dimension to the Larzac affair was not deep-rooted. Robert Lafont has argued that the anti-globalization demonstrations on the Larzac in 2003 were in fact on a continuum from the events of the 1970s, and that the latter had been an international phenomenon (Lafont interview November 4 2003). As Alland and Alland conclude:

the Larzac was lucky to benefit from... the cultural mode of the late 1960s, a short term and historically precise moment in which significant numbers of young French people were concerned with, and willing to act on, such problems as environmental pollution, disarmament and self-determination (Alland and Alland 1994: 159).

## **6.5 Occitan participation in the conflict between the viticulteurs of Languedoc and the French government during the 1970s**

The history of the relationship of the viticulteurs of Languedoc and the French state is marked by a number of conflicts, the revolt of 1907 leaving a folk memory in the region which was subsequently incorporated into the symbolic armoury of the Occitanists<sup>1</sup>. The conflict of the 1970s was the culmination of a series of circumstances, including the effects of the settlement in 1962 to end the Algerian war for independence, and the impact of the agricultural policy of the Common Market, which ended state protectionism for the viticulteurs. They were exposed to competition from subsidized Algerian wines, and the massive importation of cheap Italian wines, resulting in a drastic fall in the price of local wines. This created severe economic problems for lower Languedoc, which was dependant on the monoculture of the vine ( Benet et al. 1979: 123). At the end of the 1960s the CAV, *Comités d'Action Viticoles*, were formed in defence of the local viticulteurs. Examination of the discourse of the newspaper, *L'Echo des Corbières-Tribune des Comités d'Action, Tribune Occitane*, which was set up by the maverick Henri Fabre- Colbert, conveys an idea of some of the themes of that time: defence of small family businesses, and the land itself, criticism of the notables and union leaders, praise for peasant virtues and criticism of the alienation of contemporary urban life, and a celebration of Occitan civilization (Quéré 1978: 261). Under the influence of Fabre-Colbert there was a poujadist strain, and also a certain misogyny in some of the articles. One of the leaders of the viticulteurs, Jean Vialade claimed however that Fabre-Colbert and *L'Echo des Corbières* did more to instill the Occitan idea into the 'milieu viticole' than any texts of whatever 'groupuscule occitaniste' considered itself the repository of the truth (Vialade 1976a: 235). The militant activity of the viticulteurs, which included the attacking of tanker lorries importing Italian wines, became more extreme in the period 1975-1976, and it was during this period that the Occitanist movement, particularly VVAP, became more actively involved.

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. in the song of Marti, 'c'était l'an 1907,' quoted in Benet et al 1979: 69.

According to Tautil, when VVAP was formed in 1974 one of its aims was to engage in the social movements of Occitania, and right from the start the political movement involved itself in the social movement centred on the CAV (Tautil 1997: 20). VVAP employed methods of mobilization typical of social movements. Tarrow states that social movements draw on social networks, common purposes and cultural frameworks. They sustain their collective action by creating connective structures and collective identities (Tarrow 1998: 4). Many examples exist of the creation of such linkages. In July 1975 VVAP supporters and viticulteurs met at Lagrasse (Aude) to form a new VVAP committee of 24 members. Each member was to return to his own village with three or four prospective contacts, with the aim of creating further committees, and thus 'snowballing' membership, whilst raising awareness of the issues over a wider area (Tautil 1997:31). The Teatra de la Carriera presented its play 'Vie et Mort de M. Occitania' in the wine producing villages of the Aude and Hérault, creating a link between the Occitanist avant- guard and the most politicized members of the CAV (Vidal 2000:21). The militant singer, Claude Marti, an active member of VVAP, carried out a large number of concerts in conjunction with the viticulteurs' cause, and Juge states that members of the CAV believed that Marti and his music played a preponderant role in their quest for an Occitan identity (Juge 1999: 177).

In addition to methods of mobilization, the kind of militant activities which the members of VVAP were involved in in conjunction with the viticulteurs conform to the definition of the type of 'collective challenge' mounted by social movements. 'Collective challenges are most often marked by interrupting, obstructing, or rendering uncertain the activities of others' (Tarrow 1998: 5). Although Tarrow quotes Mann's view that Southern French wine growers 'have used violence against property so consistently in their struggles to maintain prices and keep out foreign wine that dumping wine on the roads and invading government offices is, for them, virtually an institutionalized form of protest' (Tarrow 1998: 95), many of the protest events in the mid 1970s used the 'largely unconventional methods' referred to by Duyvendak (Duyvendak 1995: 13). Perhaps the most dramatic example of such a collective challenge is the 'terre perdue' operation of the night of July 31 1975. This carefully orchestrated operation is also an illustration of the 'overlapping interests and values' at the base of common actions in social movements (Tarrow 1998: 6). The scheme was aimed at halting, and creating confusion among, the mass of tourists from

northern Europe en route through Languedoc at the start of the August holiday period. Roadblocks were set up on the A9 motorway in the Hérault (the main route towards Spain). Demonstrations took place in the Gard. In the Aude every road sign was systematically destroyed, painted over, or moved so as to create complete confusion among the foreign tourists unfamiliar with the rural roads on to which they were diverted<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the area graffiti stated ‘vive le midi viticole’ and ‘volem viure al país’ (Tautil 1997: 32-33). The purpose was multiple: to draw to the attention of the tourists the problems of the wine producers, to make a protest against the ‘invasion’ of tourists and tourist developments, which was one of the platforms of the Occitanists’ internal colonialist argument, and to strike a blow at the government by creating a multitude of diplomatic incidents resulting from the complaints from tourists (Comités d’Action Viticoles 1976: 201). Although the action led to violent confrontations with the CRS, it achieved its objective of gaining mass media coverage. The more traditional demonstrations which occurred during the viticulteurs’ campaign united viticulteurs, Occitanists, parties of the left and trade unionists, thus giving substance to the view that this was indeed a social movement which united wide sections of the local population. At each of the massive rallies at Perpignan, Carcassonne, Nîmes, and Montpellier Occitan banners flew over the crowds. Coulon states that as months went by the wineproducers’ struggle became that of a whole region which felt itself forgotten, ‘et les thèmes occitanistes ont fleuri dans les discours des acteurs’<sup>2</sup> (Coulon 1978: 98).

How deep-rooted, however, was the Occitanist penetration of the ‘masses populaires’? Vidal (Vidal 2000) made a study of MIVOC, the Mouvement d’Intervention Viticole Occitan, created by a team of Occitan viticulteurs around Jean Huillet. Huillet, a member of Lutte Occitane, stated that as Occitans they were defending the political, economic and cultural interests of their area, against the tourist industry, the military camps and the nuclear power stations (Formaggio 1976: 153, citing interview of Huillet by Bazalgues in *Dire* February 1976). The manifesto of MIVOC incorporates the anti-capitalist arguments of Lutte Occitane, and accuses the government of sacrificing the agricultural population of

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<sup>1</sup> The ensuing chaos can best be appreciated by reading the only slightly fictionalized account of the events in chapters 3-5 of *Caminarem*, the novel based on the events of 1975-76 (Chabrol and Marti 1978).

<sup>2</sup> And Occitanists’ themes flourished in the discourse of those involved.



Occitania (Vidal 2000: 52). Vidal points out however that the 'revendication occitane' is not expressed strongly, the term Occitan itself only appearing twice in the document, and appearing to refer only to the Septimanie, the area which corresponds to modern day lower Languedoc. He argues that there is a difference between the image created by MIVOC, with the Occitan flags which flew over their demonstrations, and the reality of their opposition to capitalist forces (Vidal 2000: 56-57). Rouquette claimed that Huillet's Occitanism was sentimental and recuperated, without a real Occitan geo-political dimension (Vidal interview of Rouquette Vidal 2000: 138). It appears therefore that even in the viticulteurs' organization purporting to be Occitan in orientation, the Occitan themes were not entrenched, and this appears to be more generally the case also. Laval states that the Occitan movement intervened primarily at the top, via the influence of leaders such as Michel Romain and Jean Vialade, who were members of VVAP, but that the link was never consolidated at the base (Laval 1980: 31). In his sociological analysis of the Occitan movement in 1976, Dubet concedes that Le Bris was correct in stating that the viticulture movement was the only mass movement at that time capable of carrying the Occitan idea, but argues that it was too closely linked to the specific economic climate of the wine market, the defence of a monoculture which could be interpreted as the defence of one section of Occitania, Languedoc, for it to go beyond this situation to develop stable, global, social objectives (Dubet 1976: 312).

The dramatic events at Montredon, near Narbonne, on March 4 1976 provided a psychological shock which marked a turning point in the viticulteurs' struggle. A confrontation between viticulteurs, armed with hunting rifles, and CRS forces led to the death of one man on each side, and around 30 injured (Bosc 1976: 173-178 eye witness account). In the following period, after state repression, and then modest measures to aid the wine-producers, the CAV withdrew from active involvement (Juge 1999: 290). Those Occitanists, who like Rouquette had argued that the Occitan cause could not be identified with the cause of the viticulteurs, which only concerned one region, had their position strengthened. De La Pierre argues that this weakening of mass mobilization, which wanted in some way to be Occitan, but which did not have the symbolic progressivist value of the Larzac conflict, marks the point at which many of the Occitanists increasingly associated their fate with the French left (De La Pierre 1993b: 104).

## 6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter it has been demonstrated that in the early and mid 1970s certain aspects of the Occitan movement's programme were compatible with the prevailing ideology of the post 1968 wave of social movement activity in France. Both in its organizational form and its methods of mobilization at that period its behaviour was in conformity with definitions of social movement methods. The involvement of the Occitan movement in the Larzac affair and the viticultural crisis form the two arenas in which it was able to promote its ideology, and provide a public platform for its programme. It has been established that its impact, however, was not as profound as is suggested by the emphasis on these events in the contemporary Occitan militant literature, for example the books of Michel le Bris (Le Bris 1974 and 1975), which thus give a distorted impression of the effectiveness of the movement at that period. It is contended that in spite of this, one must conclude that, in terms of converting the wider population, no other circumstances have since arisen to offer the possibilities of dissemination of the Occitanists' political and social programme on such a scale. The Occitan movement benefited from the historical situation in post 1968 France. By the time of the second wave of new social movement activity starting in the late 1980s, political Occitanism had moved into the formal electoral arena, with the establishment of the Partit Occitan in 1987, and the subcultural aims of that second wave were no longer congruent with the ethnoregionalist programme.

Part Two has traced the evolution of the political groups within Occitanism 1974-2000, and noted the difficult relationship between the political and the cultural within the movement. An analysis has been made of the nature of the movement's involvement in social movement activity in France during the 1970s, and it has been pointed out that the apparent success of the movement at that time was to some degree illusory. This historical overview of Occitanist activity has revealed the existence of many factors which contributed to the inherent weaknesses of the movement. Internal factors, such as organizational form, financial difficulties, a tendency towards fragmentation due to ideological differences and sub-regional loyalties, were compounded by external factors. The decline of the Occitan language, and the unwillingness of the general population of Occitania to consider the

validity of Occitanist claims, meant that the Occitan movement became increasingly marginalised over time. The events of the 1970s referred to above, appeared in retrospect to Occitanists as part of a 'golden era', the 'vingt glorieuses' or twenty glorious years' in Lafont's phrase (Lafont interview November 2003). Part Three of the thesis carries out a detailed analysis of the reasons for the marginalisation of the political wing, and its failure to achieve its aims. It examines the geographic, economic and demographic factors which explain the resistance of the Occitanian population towards Occitanist ideas. The political factors which contributed to the movement's difficulties are investigated. It is contended that leadership weaknesses play a contributory role in the failure to mobilize a higher level of support for the political programme. The issue of mobilization is then addressed further, with an analysis of the reasons for the resistance of specific groups, industrial workers, women, and the young, and an evaluation of the methods of mobilization used, and their effectiveness.

## **PART THREE AN ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS WHY THE POLITICAL WING OF THE OCCITAN MOVEMENT HAS FAILED TO ACHIEVE ITS AIMS**

### **Chapter 7 The effects of geographic, economic and demographic factors on the potential for success of the Occitan political movement**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Although one can find contributory reasons for the failure of the Occitan movement to attain its stated aims by examining internal factors specific to it, such as organizational and leadership style, and problems resulting from external political factors common to all ethnoregionalist movements acting within the context of the French State, the fact remains that in comparison with others, particularly those in Corsica and in Brittany, it has had to combat a major obstacle, that of the nature of the geographical territory involved, and the associated difficulties of creating a sense of identity among the population of the territory. The territory which constitutes Occitania, covering approximately one third of France, plus small areas within Italy and Spain, has been described in Chapter 1. This chapter examines the problems, both of policy and logistics, created by the extent and heterogeneity of Occitania. It points out that the difficulties of creating a communal Occitan sense of identity could perhaps have been minimized if a shared history had provided a unifying mobilizing force, but that no such history existed, in spite of efforts by militants to construct one. In addition, the existence of a strong local sense of identity in certain sub-regions of Occitania, based on historical, linguistic and geographical factors, has countered the efforts, whether by the Parti Nationaliste Occitan or the Partit Occitan, to construct a pan-Occitan identity. The way in which a number of linked economic and demographic factors during the period under review further reduced the potential for mobilizing the population is also considered.

## 7.2 The territory of Occitania

The fundamental problem for Occitanists was summarized by Rouquette during a conference in 1979:

L'Occitanie, vous ne la trouverez nulle part sur les cartes du monde. Ni celles d'aujourd'hui, ni celles du passé. C'est qu'en effet, il n'y a jamais eu d'Etat qui se soit appelé Occitanie. Jamais. La Corse a existé comme telle. La Bretagne, bien qu'elle ne soit pas une île, a existé comme telle. Lorsque ces deux nations sont tombées sous la coupe de l'Etat français, elles constituaient elles-mêmes un Etat, duché de Bretagne ou République Corse. Ce n'est pas le cas de l'Occitanie. Le pays que nous désignons par ce nom, c'est morceau par morceau qu'il a été avalé par la France, au fil des siècles<sup>1</sup>. (Rouquette in Touraine 1981b: 71)

As Nelli states, 'On ne peut définir l'Occitanie que comme un ensemble géographique où est parlé – ou a été parlé – un dialecte occitan'<sup>2</sup> (Nelli 1978: 24). The significance of regional languages in the creation of identity has been discussed in Chapter 5, where it was established that the decline of the Occitan language has diminished its potential to act as a symbol of a hypothetical Occitan identity, or as an instrument of mobilization of the population.

Given that as Rouquette stated, and many others have pointed out, Occitania has never existed as a state in any form, and the language which acts as its major marker is in decline, is there any way in which Occitanian territory is perceived as a single entity by its population? It is clear that its lack of recognizable physical boundaries and its geographical diversity mean that there is no sense of identification with it on the part of its population, partly because for the majority the concept is completely alien. On the evidence of informal questioning of French contacts in the South of France over a number of years, even the word itself is not generally recognized. It seems that ethnoregionalist activists benefit, both in their efforts to secure the adherence of their target population and to gain acceptance for their proposals from central government, if the physical boundaries of the

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<sup>1</sup> You won't find Occitania anywhere on the maps of the world. Neither current ones nor those of the past. That's because there has never been a state called Occitania. Corsica existed as such. Brittany, although it is not an island, existed as such. When these two nations came under the control of the French state, they themselves constituted states, the Duchy of Brittany or the Corsican Republic. This is not the case for Occitania. The area which we designate by this title was swallowed up by France bit by bit, as centuries went by.

<sup>2</sup> Occitania can only be defined as a geographical unity where an Occitan dialect is spoken, or was spoken in the past.

area which is the object of their proposals are clearly delineated. This is illustrated most clearly in the case of Corsica. As early as 1959 the French government's Plan d'Action Régionale stated that the fact that Corsica is an island made it the only département of metropolitan France which constituted 'une région naturelle incontestable'<sup>1</sup> (cited Loughlin 1987: 134). Loughlin emphasizes that when the socialist government granted the Statut Particulier for Corsica in 1982 it recognized Corsica as possessing characteristics which marked it off from the rest of France. The law states:

L'organisation de la région de Corse tient compte des spécificités de cette région résultant notamment de sa géographie et de son histoire<sup>2</sup>. (cited Loughlin 1987: 299)

As Loughlin adds, the fact that Corsica is an island meant that its cultural system had survived longer than that of other regions (Loughlin 1987: 344). This contributed to the maintenance of the Corsican language over a longer period. Thus in the case of Corsica two of the conditions for political separatism noted by Smith, a sense of territorial separateness and a sense of cultural distinctiveness, are fulfilled (Smith 1981: 12-13). This is further illustrated by the case of Brittany. Though not so clearly geographically distinctive as Corsica, its situation as a wide peninsula still gives it a physical identity separate from the rest of France. It had a long history as a relatively independent political unit, the Duchy of Brittany, which though incorporated into the French kingdom in 1532 was allowed to maintain much of its semi-autonomous character until the French Revolution. Loughlin points out that the Church and the nobility helped to maintain the cohesiveness of Breton society, and its cultural distinctiveness as a Celtic area (Loughlin 1987: 44-45). Parks noted during her investigation into sub-state Celtic identity that most of her interviewees in Brittany emphasized history or a sense of the past as significant causal factors of their identification with the region (Parks 2003: 121-122). Although in both Corsica and Brittany, like in Occitania, there do exist physical sub-divisions of territory and variants of the language, the former regions have a specific identity recognizable by their populations. The long-term results of this enhanced identity can be seen in data from surveys carried out in the French regions by the Observatoire Interrégionale du Politique in 1999, to investigate the relative strength of levels of

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<sup>1</sup> Indisputably a natural region.

<sup>2</sup> The organization of the region of Corsica takes into account its special characteristics resulting in particular from its geography and its history.

identification with the region and with France. Schrijver in his analysis of the data highlights the fact that the feeling of attachment to the region was strongest in Corsica, where nearly 80% of the population identified most strongly with region, and in Brittany, where the score was nearly 70%. These were the only two regions where the percentage with a strong attachment to the region exceeded the percentage with a strong attachment to the nation<sup>1</sup> (Schrijver 2003: 9-10). Although the survey showed that the populations of the individual administrative regions of Occitania had a fairly high level of attachment to their own region, with Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées having higher scores than Limousin and Aquitaine<sup>2</sup>, there is of course no national data which asks for the respondents' levels of attachment to Occitania. It is possible to make some assumptions about what the response to such a question might be by extrapolating from data provided in the 1991 Média Pluriel Méditerranée survey on the use of the Occitan language in Languedoc-Roussillon. Question 58 (cited in Hammel and Gardy 1994: 197) asked the respondents to state whether emotionally they felt themselves to be 'Mérional, Méditerranéen, Languedocien, Provençal, Cévenol, Héraultais, Gardois, Audois, Lozèrien, Occitan, Catalan' or first of all, French. The result was categorical. The smallest number, only 1% of the sample of 939, thought of themselves as Occitan. As Gardy notes, 'le refus du terme est bien massif'<sup>3</sup> (Hammel and Gardy 1994:126). It seems reasonable to conclude that if so few identified themselves as Occitan in the area which had most exposure to the activity of the Occitan movement from the late 1960s onwards, it is unlikely that the response would be significantly higher in other areas of Occitania. The contrast with the identification of Corsicans and Bretons with their territory, referred to above, is striking, and not only illustrates the lack of success of the Occitanists in their efforts to promote an Occitan identity, but also has implications for their potential to gain electoral success. The importance of this issue is noted by Acha Ugarte and Pérez-Nievas with regard to the situation of the Basques in Spain:

If we had to highlight one single explanatory variable for the success of nationalist parties in the Basque country, it would be the well-entrenched sense of regional identity of the Basque population. (Acha Ugarte and Pérez-Nievas 1998: 101)

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<sup>1</sup> These were not mutually exclusive.

<sup>2</sup> Data was not provided for Auvergne.

<sup>3</sup> The rejection of the term is quite massive.

Any attempt by Occitanists to create a sense of identification with Occitania on the part of its population comes up against the fact that as well as lacking a clearly defined territorial frontier, Occitania lacks homogeneity. Physically it covers around one third of French territory, which geographers have divided into three large natural and human entities, the ‘Midi-Méditerranéen’ consisting of the administrative regions of Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, and Languedoc-Roussillon; the south-west or Atlantic Occitania, made up of Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrénées; and the northern part of the Massif Central, Limousin and Auvergne (Lavelle 2004:21). (The added complication of the existence of Occitan territory within Spain and Italy is discussed in Chapter 7.6.) The fact that the current administrative divisions of France do not coincide precisely with the linguistic frontiers of Occitania acts as a further impediment to territorial clarity. As well as the fact that Languedoc-Roussillon includes the Catalan area of Roussillon, Aquitaine includes an area which is culturally Basque, and the area around Confolens, linguistically Occitan, is attached to Poitou-Charentes rather than to the Limousin. The Drôme and Ardèche areas are attached administratively to the region of Rhône-Alpes, which is perceived as an artificial situation, as linguistically and culturally they are Occitan, and economically these areas are linked naturally with Nîmes, Avignon and Montpellier to the south, rather than to the administrative centre, Lyon, to the north of them (Volle 1999: 9). During discussions of this issue amongst members of the Partit Occitan Sumien pointed out that though the current administrative divisions often seem arbitrary, proposals for new ones using the criteria of dialectal limits would not necessarily provide the solution:

Les Aurillacois parlent languedocien, mais se sentent auvergnats pour des raisons historiques. De même le Périgord possède une profonde unité, bien qu’il soit divisé entre deux dialectes (limousin au nord et languedocien au sud). Par contre, les Nîmois, qui ont toujours été rattaché au Languedoc, parlent provençal et se sentent Provençaux<sup>1</sup>. (Sumien P.Oc. IB 38 August 1993: 25)

Rouquette summarized thus the problems created for the Occitan movement by the extent and diversity of the Occitan territory:

Aucun parler, mais aussi bien aucune ville ne peuvent prétendre au leadership....Ce qui est vrai au plan de la géographie, du relief, du climat, reste

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<sup>1</sup> The people of the Aurillac area speak languedocien but feel themselves to be auvergnat for historical reasons. In the same way, Périgord has a deep-seated unity, even though it is divided between two dialects (limousin in the north and languedocien in the south). On the other hand, the people of Nîmes, who have always been joined to Languedoc, speak Provençal and feel themselves to be Provençal.



vrai au niveau de la culture et de l'économie. Nous sommes voués à la pluralité, à la différence, aux tensions internes. Ce n'est pas forcément un mal, mais cela suppose une dynamique spécifique à la réalité sociale qui est la nôtre et au temps que nous vivons. Inventer cette dynamique, c'est la tâche de ce qu'on appelle le mouvement occitan<sup>1</sup>. (Rouquette 1981: 73)

Although one can argue that the Partit Occitan did subsequently attempt to adapt to changing circumstances (see Chapter 4.3), it has not succeeded in creating the dynamic process capable of overcoming these difficulties. The fact of the heterogeneity of a territory within which an ethnoregionalist movement exists is not an inevitable bar to success. The example can be cited of the impact of the Scottish National Party, even though Scotland has considerable physical and economic internal diversity, with the east coast/ west coast divide, and the Highlands/ Lowlands divide (Parks 2003: 124). However, as in the case of Catalonia or Brittany, there are strong historical reasons which have helped to maintain a recognizable separate identity. Even after the 1707 Treaty of Union with England, Scotland maintained its own local government and legal systems (Newell 1998: 105). Although the Occitan movement attempted to create artificially an 'Occitan history'<sup>2</sup>, 'l'espace historique concrètement perçu par les Occitans ordinaires c'est l'espace local, ou à la rigueur provincial'<sup>3</sup> (Martel 1994: 311). This latter fact is significant, as it has been suggested that though there is no identification of the population with the broader Occitan territory, there do exist strong local attachments and indeed rivalries within sub-regions. This was expressed in extreme (and controversial) terms by Maurice Duverger during an interview in Barcelona:

L'autonomisme occitan,...ce n'est à mon avis que de la vaste blague. Le Pays d'Oc n'a jamais existé. Les habitants du Languedoc détestent ceux de la Provence, ceux de Nice ne peuvent sentir comme ceux de Marseille, ceux de Bordeaux ne supportent pas les Toulousains...Parler du Pays d'Oc n'est pas sérieux<sup>4</sup>. (Duverger quoted by Laval in VVAP-Languedoc 1 February 1978: 8)

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<sup>1</sup> No dialect, but also no town, can lay claim to leadership....What is true in the case of the geography, the relief, the climate, remains true at the level of culture and of the economy. We are doomed to plurality, distinctive identities, internal tensions. It is not necessarily a bad thing, but it implies the need for a specific dynamic process based on our social reality and the time we live in. Inventing this process is the task of what is known as the Occitan movement.

<sup>2</sup> This issue is discussed fully in Chapter 10.5.4

<sup>3</sup> The historical area clearly perceived by ordinary Occitans is the local area, or possibly, at most, that of the province.

<sup>4</sup> Occitan autonomism is in my opinion nothing but a great joke. The Pays d'Oc has never existed. The inhabitants of Languedoc detest those of Provence, those of Nice can't feel like those of Marseille, those of Bordeaux can't bear the Toulousains...Talk of a Pays d'Oc can't be taken seriously.

A more objective explanation of sub-regional differences in the 1970s came from Maclouf, and was based on economic factors. He referred to the duality of Occitan society as it existed at that time, contrasting the depopulation of the rural villages, for example on the Massif Central, where extremely archaic forms of agriculture still existed, with the highly industrialized urban areas such as Toulouse and Montpellier (Maclouf 1981: 78). Within this broad dichotomy further socio-economic sub-divisions appear. As Jeanjean points out, the life of an industrial worker in the shipyards of La Ciotat is very different from that of a worker at Aérospatiale in Toulouse, and that of a pastoral farmer in Cantal is different from that of a producer of fruit in the Garonne valley. Even within one form of agriculture differences appear, so that the wine producers of the Bordeaux area had different priorities from those of Languedoc<sup>1</sup> (Jeanjean 1992: 93). One might argue that these types of differences exist in any modern society, but it is still worth drawing attention to their extent within Occitania, in order to highlight the extent to which the political aims of the Occitan movement, to mobilize support for the idea of an autonomous community drawn from such diverse sources, seem unrealistic. Jeanjean has suggested that it is not the regional divisions themselves which have hindered the progress of the Occitan movement, but rather the latter's 'monolithisme...la non-reconnaissance des particularités régionales'<sup>2</sup>, and in particular the existence of what has been described as 'l'impérialisme languedocien' (Jeanjean 1992: 94). It is the latter issue which is examined in the next section, along with an overview of some aspects of the regional differences which have had a negative impact on the Occitan movement's efforts to mobilize and create a unified front in support of autonomy for the Occitan territory.

### **7.3 Regional differences and regional rivalries**

The 'Languedocian imperialism' referred to by Jeanjean is reflected in existing academic studies of the Occitan movement, which tend to focus most closely, as did Keating, 'on the more restricted territory of Languedoc, where most of the political action has occurred' (Keating 1986: 27). Touraine's study of the movement made during 1979 and 1980,

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<sup>1</sup> See below for details.

<sup>2</sup> Monolithic character...the failure to recognize the distinctive regional characteristics.

though nominally referring to the whole of Occitania, in practice devoted more of its research time to the groups meeting in Carcassonne, Narbonne, Montpellier and Nîmes, than to those in Toulouse and Limoges <sup>1</sup>, and did not carry out research in Aquitaine or Provence (Timetable of meetings Touraine 1981a: 74-75). This in itself has been a source of criticism by some Occitanists. Jeanjean has drawn attention to the fact that the two main leaders of Occitanism during the 1970s were based in Languedoc, Lafont at Montpellier and Rouquette at Béziers, thus providing a focal point for the movement. He cites unnamed Occitanists who criticized the existence of two leaders, two groups, two towns, each in competition, and failing to take into account the situation elsewhere in Occitania (Jeanjean 1995: 98). In reality this was an oversimplified assessment of the situation. Lafont came from Nîmes and his original dialect was thus Provençal, and he has written widely in the Provençal dialect as well as in the standardized form of Occitan based on central Languedocian (Chartier and Larvor 2004: 306). Rouquette himself argued that ‘il faut cesser de tout centrer sur le problème viticole ou le tourisme languedocien’<sup>2</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 137), and that it was necessary to create ‘la conscience occitane partout en pays d’oc, à Nice, Limoges, ou Valence, et pas seulement à Montpellier ou Pézenas’<sup>3</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 138). Nevertheless, as explained in Chapter 6, it is true that the problems of Languedoc did dominate the activity of the movement in the 1970s, and in the early 1980s when the wine producers of Languedoc opposed the entry of Spain and Portugal into the Common Market, it became the policy of the Occitan movement to oppose it, even though other Occitan wine producers, particularly of the higher quality Médoc and Saint Emilion wines, were in favour of it, as it opened the prospect of new markets for them (Jeanjean 1992: 94). A militant from the Bordeaux area also expressed resentment that pressure existed to promote the ‘occitan moyen, le languedocien’<sup>4</sup> rather than Gascon or Provençal (Jeanjean 1995: 98). This grievance was widely felt in the southern part of Aquitaine, and contributed to the rise of Entau País (see Chapter 4.4.4). After 1987, issues in Languedoc no longer dominated policy as the viticulture crisis had diminished, and the Partit Occitan promoted its pan-Occitan ideal. It is perhaps significant that leading figures within the

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<sup>1</sup> And Paris, where the opinions of Occitanist ‘exiles’ were sought.

<sup>2</sup> We must stop focussing everything on the wine-producing problem or that of Languedocian tourism.

<sup>3</sup> Occitan awareness everywhere within the Occitan region, at Nice, Limoges or Valence, and not only at Montpellier or Pézenas.

<sup>4</sup> Centralized Occitan, Languedocian.

party were geographically more dispersed than had been the political leaders during the 1970s. Alirol was based in Haute-Loire, Tautil in Provence, Viaule and Vilotte in Midi-Pyrénées, and Pince in Aquitaine. In 1998 there was a resurgence of Languedocian regionalist activity of a different form, when a separate organization with some commitment to Occitanist themes was established, primarily in the Aude and Hérault départements. Païs Nostre (Ligue d'Oc) states in its manifesto that the Occitan language and culture must be recognized, but its main aim appears to be the promotion of the economic development of Languedoc, and the defence of the environment (Manifesto in Païs Nostre 4 March 1999). An article in Midi-Libre (August 31 1998) pointed out that its ideas were close to those of CPNT (Chasse Pêche Nature Tradition), and Viaule was very critical of it from the perspective of the Partit Occitan, arguing that it was not really an Occitan organization, as it was limited to the defence, by a handful of members, of only one area (Viaule 2003: 49).

The main hostility to Languedocian imperialism within the Occitan movement has come from Provence. The conflict has largely been conducted at the cultural level, for historic reasons linked to the revival of the Occitan language by Mistral and the Félibrige in the nineteenth century, and the dispute over the 'graphie', the way in which the language should be written. The contemporary region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur includes territory from the historic province of Provence, which was conquered by the French state between 1246 and 1263, into which was incorporated the Papal territory of Comtat Venaissin (around Avignon) in 1790, and as recently as 1860 Nice, ceded to France as part of the negotiations leading to the unification of Italy. There exists a number of people who consider the history and identity of Provence to be so specific that the region has the potential to gain greater autonomy in its own right, and not as part of a campaign for Occitan autonomy. In the 1980s some of the Provençalist culturalist organizations developed a more political discourse 'pour empêcher de voir effacé le nom de la Provence et son identité au profit d'une Occitanie mythique'<sup>1</sup>. The Unioun Prouvençalo, created in 1981, campaigns for a special status for Provence, in some ways similar to that of Corsica (Chartier and Larvor 2004: 310). A review, Li Nouvello di Provenço, the mouthpiece of a

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<sup>1</sup> To prevent the name of Provence and its identity being erased to be supplanted by a mythical Occitania.

hyper-Provençalist movement, expressed fervent anti-Occitanist views, seeming to see Occitan rather than French as the enemy of Provençal. Individuals such as the poet and professor of sociolinguistics Philippe Blanchet have campaigned against Occitan militants who persist in calling Provençal Occitan, arguing that they are trying to create ‘une langue commune artificielle imposée de façon autoritaire’<sup>1</sup> (Blanchet 2000: 113-114). The groups which looked back to the language and written form of Mistral were in turn seen as embodying the passéist image which Occitanists had for many years tried to eradicate (La Setmana 258 25/05/2000: 4). It can thus be seen that the situation in Provence has acted as a counter to attempts to create a unified pan-Occitan movement. The response of the Partit Occitan in Provence has been to co-operate with Région Provence, a moderate regionalist grouping which is made up of a number of different organizations, including environmental ones, thereby attempting to reinforce their electoral potential, and counter the extreme views of committed Provençalists (see Chapter 4.3.6). In addition to the ideological differences referred to above, there are demographic reasons why the Occitanist movement has had difficulties in gaining a foothold in Provence. These are discussed in section 7.4 below. Associated with the demographic factors, the potential for mobilization of the population of Provence in support of the Occitan movement has since the 1980s been minimized by the growth of the Front National in that region. The Front National has provided an alternative electoral outlet for the disaffected voter, and has incorporated some regionalist themes into its programme. This topic is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.4.

The Partit Occitan has had some limited success in securing implantation in the part of Midi-Pyrénées around Toulouse and in the Tarn département around Albi, within territory which formed part of the historic province of Languedoc. The latter fact may possibly have contributed to an increased amenability to Occitanist ideas in that area, as the thirteenth century Albigensian Crusade took place there, an event which provided an important part of the propaganda for Occitanist militants, an example of the ‘mise du passé au service de l’idéologie nationale’<sup>2</sup> (Martel 1994: 312). The relative vigour of Partit Occitan committees in those areas can probably however be ascribed to the work there of certain long-term committed militants such as Vilotte and Viaule (see Chapter 4.3.3 and 4.3.6).

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<sup>1</sup> An artificial communal language imposed in an authoritarian fashion.

<sup>2</sup> Putting the past to use to support the national ideology.

Elsewhere in the current administrative areas of Midi-Pyrénées and of Aquitaine, which formed the historic provinces of Gascony and Guyenne, it has either been difficult to create any interest at all, or the interest has had a local colouration which has resisted the efforts of the Partit Occitan to promote its pan-Occitan ideal. As explained in Chapter 4.4.4, in Béarn members of the local group of VVAP initiated efforts to distance themselves from 'l'impérialisme languedocien', and subsequently Entau Païs emerged as a rival to the Partit Occitan. The area has a strong local identity, based on historic and linguistic factors. Béarn was an independent Gascon province until 1589, when its king, Henry III became Henry IV of France. It finally lost its autonomy in 1620, after which subsequent kings referred to themselves as kings of France, and not kings of France and Navarre (Formaggio 1976: 13). Although the 1539 Edict of Villers-Cotterêts had imposed French as the language of administration, the Gascon dialect of Occitan remained the official language of Béarn until 1620 (P.Oc. IB 38 August 1993: 13). 'De tous les dialectes occitans, le gascon est le plus différencié'<sup>1</sup> (Lavelle 2004: 43), and within Gascon Béarnais is the most notable subgroup (Lavelle 2004: 43). The maintenance of a sense of separateness has been aided to a certain extent by the relative isolation of this largely rural area in the foothills of the Pyrénées.

It has also proved difficult for the Occitan movement to gain influence in Aquitaine. Its historic ties with England differentiate it culturally, and the fact that it is turned economically towards the Atlantic rather than the Mediterranean, differentiates it from Provence and Languedoc. The situation is complicated by the existence of the Northern Basque country within the Pyrénées-Atlantiques département. It is felt by some Occitanists that the regional administration of Aquitaine, which has to defend and balance its support for two cultures, Occitan and Basque, has given a disproportionate amount of support to the Basque language and culture, given the respective area of territory and population figures (and that this is in part due to the political impact of the wider Basque campaign) (Escartin interview June 2004). This rivalry extends even to the delimitation of Basque and Occitan territory, with debate existing over whether Biarritz and Bayonne are Occitan or Basque, as Occitan was spoken there since the fourteenth century, but Basque has also been spoken

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<sup>1</sup> Gascon is the most differentiated of all the Occitan dialects.

there from the twentieth century (P.Oc IB 38 August 1993: 14). There appears to be very little identification with Occitan political aims within Aquitaine, with very few references to it within the internal bulletins of the Partit Occitan. Since 1996 the few Occitanists of different groups, the Partit Occitan, and in a rare example of cooperation, the PNO, have combined with some of the Occitan cultural organizations in the Gironde, Dordogne and Agen areas of northern Aquitaine, under the heading Unitat d'Oc, for the purpose of forming electoral lists. It is described by Viaule as 'une coordination circonstancielle qui est réactivée épisodiquement selon les besoins'<sup>1</sup> (Viaule 2003: 48).

It is also the case that Occitanism has had little impact in the Limousin region, which is very different geographically and economically from the southern areas of Occitania. It has been suggested that a contributory reason is the fact that due to its relative isolation (and lack of sun!) unlike Languedoc and Provence it has not seen its culture threatened by a 'tourist invasion' (Escartin interview June 2004), although in recent years the introduction of low cost airlines to Limoges has encouraged the purchase of housing by British families. Even during the time of greatest Occitanist activity in the 1970s mobilization was difficult in Limousin. The isolation of the rural communities on the Massif Central acted as a disincentive to organized militancy, and their interests were different from those of the population to the south. During the activity of VVAP in the mid 1970s the economic needs of the cattle breeders of the Limousin were different from those of the viticulteurs of Languedoc. As they exported animals to Italy, it was not in their interests to campaign for the closure of the frontiers with Italy in order to defend Languedocian wine production (Touraine 1981a: 128). A feeling of isolation was expressed by an unnamed member of the Limousin branch of the Partit Occitan, who indicated the problems created by the contrast between the rural world of low wage earners in the Limousin, and the Provençal world, of modernity, with its high-tech research and industry (P.Oc. IB 39 September 1993: 22).

These examples in no way constitute a comprehensive survey of the regional differences, but serve to indicate the underlying regional diversity of Occitania, which has countered efforts to create a sense of communal identity even among individuals who take an interest in the Occitan culture. The potential for creating any such feeling amongst the general

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<sup>1</sup> A committee which is reactivated from time to time according to circumstances.

population of Occitania has been diminished still further since the 1970s, as a result of economic and demographic changes, and, paradoxically, as a result of a greater homogenization of society.

#### **7.4 Economic and demographic factors reducing the potential for Occitanist mobilization**

Since the surge of Occitanist activity during the 1970s, referred to in Chapter 6, economic change in France as a whole and within Occitania has further reduced the potential in Occitania for creating the 'we- feeling' referred to by Hoogh as one of the pre-requisites for promoting a social movement which can encompass and support groups which are engaged in ethnoregionalist protest (Hoogh 1992: 34). Klandermans draws attention to the fact that numerous authors stress the importance of the definition of a situation as being unjust, for mobilization to occur in a social movement. 'Adopting an injustice framework is an important precondition of resistance' (Klandermans 1988:177). The internal colonialism paradigm, which as Keating states is now accepted in France as being 'as much a political rallying cry as a rigorous academic analysis' (Keating 1988: 13), was able to act as a mobilizing force as long as there was sufficient objective evidence to make the thesis credible to the public. As Smith concedes, though economic deprivation and economic exploitation do not in themselves 'generate ethnic sentiments or nationalist movements', they are 'grist to the nationalist mill' (Smith 1981: 44). The appearance of militant political Occitanism in the 1960s, and its evolution in the early 1970s, was, as explained in Chapter 3, linked to economic distress within Occitania, and expressed in propaganda form in the guise of the internal colonialism thesis. Examination of the militant literature and internal bulletins produced by the Occitan movement during the 1960s and the 1970s reveals a number of recurring themes. Resentment, and indeed a sense of injustice, is expressed at an unacceptably low level of industrialization, the decline of existing industry, a high level of unemployment which imposed an unwilling migration of the young to the north to find work, and the sacrifice by the state of the agriculture of the south to protect the interests of that of the north. Criticism was made of the response of the state to these problems, which were seen as being inadequate, or yet further examples of exploitation. The development of



tourist resorts in Languedoc and Aquitaine was particularly resented. Touraine concluded in his study of the movement made in the late 1970s:

Le mouvement occitan superpose à la carte linguistique celle du sous-développement relatif des régions méridionales, celle des industries fragiles, celle des secteurs archaïques, celle de l'exode vers les régions plus riches et celle des 'vocations touristiques'. C'est dans le Languedoc de la monoculture viticole, du Gard à l'Aude, que le mouvement occitan semble se lier le plus fortement aux luttes économiques.<sup>1</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 17)

Although the specific economic situation of Languedoc during the 1960s and 1970s seemed to conform fairly closely to the internal colonialism paradigm, it was true that other parts of Occitania were equally disadvantaged. Limousin in particular was under-industrialized, and its population compelled to seek work outside the region, whilst it was considerably more deprived than Languedoc as far as services were concerned. Between 1954 and 1975 Limousin had the lowest regional rate of economic growth, the lowest numbers involved in manufacturing industry, a ten per cent fall in total employment, and the lowest average wages in the country (Turpin 1981: 85). It is not relevant here to analyse in depth the closeness of the actual economic situation in Occitania to the internal colonialist thesis<sup>2</sup>, but to confirm that there was sufficient evidence to make the propaganda credible, and to encourage the sense of injustice referred to by Klandermans. As such it was able to provide a mobilizing force for the Occitan movement during the late 1960s and 1970s.

This potential for mobilization had disappeared by the 1990s, a point which Lafont, the propagator of the internal colonialism thesis in France, has stressed in recent years. Occitania has become a relatively prosperous society, even if unevenly so, and 's'il y a des problèmes ce sont les mêmes problèmes que la France. Il n'y a pas de problèmes spécifiquement occitans'<sup>3</sup> (Lafont interview November 4 2003). Analysts have noted the increasing homogenization of French society, both industrially, particularly since the crises

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<sup>1</sup> The Occitan movement superimposes on to the linguistic map that of the relative underdevelopment of the southern regions, that of the fragile industries, that of the archaic sectors, that of the exodus to the richer regions, and that of the areas designated as destined for tourism. It is in the Languedoc of the monoculture of the vine, from the Gard to the Aude, that the Occitan movement seems to be linked the strongest to the economic conflicts.

<sup>2</sup> This is done with regard to Languedoc itself in Ritson 1988, unpublished M.A. Dissertation, 'An assessment of the contribution made by economic factors to Occitan regionalist activity in Languedoc in the 1970s'. Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic.

<sup>3</sup> If there are problems, they are the same problems as France has. There are no problems specifically Occitan.

in the textile and steel industries, and sociologically, due to the reduction in the cleavage between urban and rural society (Benoit, Benoit and Pucci 1998: 17). As the north of France fell victim to economic crisis, with Lorraine and Nord Pas de Calais facing difficulties of reconversion, it was no longer possible to make out a case for Occitania as being in an unfair or deprived position. Modern industries are no longer dependent on the presence of coal and iron, and the new technologies and improved means of communication allow for flexibility of industrial siting (Jeanjean 1992: 153). Lafont has drawn attention to what the press has referred to as 'the revenge of the south' and the 'boom du Midi'. Agricultural reconversion has modernized the rural areas, such as the Lozère, and Languedoc has moved from the mass production of poor quality wines to those of high quality. Sectors such as those of computers and other electronics have contributed to the growth of Montpellier and Toulouse (Lafont 2003: 222-223). Although interregional disparities still exist, the overall economic situation of the Occitan territory is a more positive one than it was during the 1960s and the 1970s. Alirol recognized this changed situation, when in his opening speech at the congress which instituted the Partit Occitan he spoke of the need to modernize the Occitanist discourse to take into account economic as well as political change (P.Oc. IB 1 August 1987:2), but it does not appear that a mobilizing theme as powerful as that of internal colonialism has been found to replace it.

Demographic factors have also contributed to the increasing difficulties of the Occitan movement in securing support, by creating an environment which is resistant to proposals promoting the concept of a unified and autonomous Occitan community, in which the Occitan language would play a defining role. The population structure of Occitania is such that the number of inhabitants who have stable and long-term familial roots in the area continues to decline. Although the 'forced' exodus of the young from Occitania to the north of France to find work was frequently referred to in Occitanist propaganda, an exodus which contributed, for example, to the relative depopulation of certain parts of Limousin, it is also true that certain parts of Occitania have experienced population growth over a long period, due to migration into the area rather than to natural growth (Alcouffe 1979: 47). After 1962 there was an influx of 'rapatriés', French settlers repatriated after Algerian independence. The majority of these settled in Provence or in the Toulouse area. Between 1962, and 1974 when the French government introduced measures to restrict immigration,

Algerian, Moroccan, Portuguese, and to a lesser extent Italian and Spanish, workers moved into in particular Provence and the Haute Garonne area. Over a long period there was an influx of retired people from the north of France, seeking a warmer climate. After the development of the Languedocian coastal resorts in the 1960s increasing numbers of Dutch and Belgians moved in (Alcouffe 1979: 44). More recently there has been an influx of British and Dutch into rural areas such as the Dordogne (Jeanjean 1992:155).

Although he was referring specifically to the case of Languedoc-Roussillon, Hammel's statement that 'le brassage de populations, dans cette terre de migrations,...font qu'une fraction importante de la population résidente, venue d'ailleurs ou autochtone, ne participe pas, en conscience, des langues occitanes ou catalane et qu'elle ne se sent pas représentée par les traits culturels (que peuvent être l'accent, la sardane ou les feux de St.Jean)'<sup>1</sup> (Hammel 1996: 28), could be applied to other parts of Occitania. Statistics from INSEE on the levels of inter-regional migration within the twenty-two French metropolitan regions between the 1982 and 1990 census reveal that the balance of immigration over emigration was positive for ten of the twenty-two, three of the ten being positive by less than 1%. Five of the positive ones were the Occitan regions, where the balance was positive by 6.7% in Languedoc-Roussillon, by 4.2% in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (the two highest scores), by 3.4% in Midi-Pyrénées, by 3.2% in Aquitaine, and by 1.1% in Limousin. Auvergne was the only Occitan region with a marginally negative balance, minus 0.3% (Source La France et ses régions INSEE 1997 cited in Dupoirier 1998: 305-370). Statistics for 1990 which reveal the level of foreign populations within the regions show that of the nine regions where the percentage was above the national average of 5.1%, two were Occitan, Languedoc-Roussillon with 6.3%, and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur with 7.1% (Source Statistiques et indicateurs des régions françaises {SIRF} annexe à la loi de finances 1995 INSEE 1995, cited in Dupoirier 1998: 305-370).

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<sup>1</sup> The intermixture of populations, in this land of migrations, means that a significant proportion of the resident population, whether from elsewhere or native, in all conscience does not share in the Occitan or Catalan languages, or feel represented by cultural traits such as the accent, or traditions such as the sardana or the bonfires to celebrate the summer solstice.

The implications of demographic factors, particularly in Provence, were recognized by Occitan militants. An internal bulletin of the West Var (Provence) committee of VVAP stated:

On peut comprendre dans notre région la difficulté qu'il y a à faire avancer l'idée occitane. La dégradation de la vie politique, la composition sociologique de nos villes (10 à 20% de Provençaux), l'absence de plus en plus évidente de toute conscience occitane dans l'espace urbanisée... Le nombre important de retraités étrangers à la région posent de plus en plus problème... Provence maritime, il faut bien que nos camarades occitanistes de l'Occitanie occidentale et septentrionale s'en rendent compte, c'est l'idée même de l'identité occitane qui est en train d'être remise en question, voire d'être liquidée<sup>1</sup>. (VVAP IB February-March 1985: 12)

A more precise perspective can be gained from statistics from the 1999 INSEE census figures for Toulouse (summarized by Bethveder in *La Setmana* 282 16/11/2000: 4). Between 1990 and 1999 178,000 people moved into Toulouse, meaning that in that period 1 in 3 of the city's population were newcomers. 60% of these were under 30, and only 47% were from elsewhere in Occitan territory. 23% came from the Paris region. There were around 25,000 foreigners, including 7,000 of North African origin, the rest being Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, British and German. (Although these figures will reflect the positive attraction of the aeronautical and aerospace industries, and the city's universities, similar situations exist in cities like Montpellier and Marseille.) In his commentary on the statistics Bethveder described Toulouse as being in state of rapid de-occitanization.

It appears therefore that the trend towards the creation of an increasingly mixed society within Occitania has increased during the period since the 1970s, and that this has had implications for the political wing of the Occitanist movement. It has not been able to benefit from the kind of positive climate created by a strong sense of common identity of the inhabitants of a region which has, as De Winter points out, been seen to benefit ethnoregionalist parties in Spain, Belgium, Scotland and Wales (De Winter 1998: 216-217).

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<sup>1</sup> You can understand the difficulty that there is in our region to further the Occitan idea. The debasement of the quality of political life, the sociological composition of our towns (10 to 20% Provençals), the increasingly obvious absence of any Occitan awareness in the urbanized areas... the significant number of retired people from outside the region present increasing problems. Fellow Occitanists of western and northern Occitania must be made aware of the fact that in maritime Provence it is even the idea of the Occitan identity which is in the process of being challenged, even abandoned.

## **7.5 A comment on the practical implications of territorial factors**

The extended and diverse nature of the Occitan territory has had a number of effects, including the major one of a resort to localism by different Occitanist groups, as described in Chapter 4. It is worth drawing attention to the logistical difficulties created for any group, such as the Partit Occitan, which envisaged a pan-Occitan role. As Martel notes, the Occitan territory is too vast to be covered efficiently by a few hundred militants, however active (Martel 1989: 14). Even within regions communication is not always easy. In 1994 the Partit Occitan was advocating an improved regional structure, with meetings at least once a year, to allow militants to meet each other, 'ce qui ne favorise pas naturellement l'espace Occitan'<sup>1</sup> (P.Oc. IB 46 December 1994: 14). The time and expense involved in getting together for meetings is considerable. Rouquette pointed out the difficulties for members from Béziers, or even more so from Nice, for example, if a meeting is held in Périgueux (Rouquette interview September 24 2003). The problem of distance is exacerbated by the nature of the French transport infrastructure, which favoured north-south routes, with Paris as the focal point, rather than transverse ones. In addition, it is pointed out that the rural areas of Occitania have been most affected by the closing down of railway branch lines (Tautil 1997: 291).

At the level of policy creation, the diversity of situations resulting from geography has made it difficult to draw up a programme capable of taking into account all the problems (Martel 1989: 14). It has also meant that even proposals for possible administrative divisions of the Occitan territory in any future situation of autonomy have been controversial. Rouquette argues that a basic problem is the reluctance of most Occitanists to admit that there are in fact 'two Occitanias', one based around Toulouse, and one around Marseille (Rouquette interview September 24 2003), a division which envisages an Atlantic Occitania and a Mediterranean Occitania. Proposals for a potential administrative centre for the whole of Occitanian territory come up against the question of distance, and of the local loyalties referred to earlier. Lugan stated that an executive and legislature established

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<sup>1</sup> Which the Occitan territory does not naturally make easy.

at Nîmes, Millau or Albi would risk being perceived by an inhabitant of Bordeaux, Clermont-Ferrand or Nice as being as distant, thus also as uncontrollable and intolerable, as government from Paris (Lugan 1997: 118). Lugan's suggestion was therefore that there should be a number of localized regional councils, which would in due time negotiate amongst themselves, and with the central French government, or possibly in the future at a European level, the form of a Pan-Occitan authority (Lugan 1997:120). Even the form of potential regional divisions was subject to argument. Lafont, and VVAP in its 1980 programme, proposed four broad regions based on economic criteria, Aquitaine-Pyrénées, Auvergne-Limousin, Guyenne-Languedoc, and Alpes-Provence. In each case the borders would be adjusted to take into account existing linguistic anomalies. It was conceded that this division would still be to some extent an artificial one (VVAP Proposition de Statut d'Autonomia, cited in Tautil 1997: 280). Sumien, whilst still a member of the Partit Occitan, argued that these plans would indeed create artificial groupings, and that any new Occitan regions should be defined on the basis of historical and cultural criteria, to encourage a sense of local identity, which could then act as a stimulus to economic development. He proposed seven regions, Gascogne, Limousin, Auvergne, Provence, Languedoc, Guyenne and Drôme-Vivarais or Ardèche. The current Partit Occitan programme now states that its aim is the creation of an Autonomous Community of Occitania, with an appointed executive, and regrouping the elected members for the regions referred to by Sumien, except that the Drôme-Vivarais region is referred to as the Dauphiné. Although the programme does not refer to a choice of administrative centre, in response to a question from an Austrian on the web-site of the party, asking whether Occitania has a capital, it is stated that:

Tolosa (Toulouse) peut être considérée comme la capitale. Mais l'Occitanie étant un ensemble de régions, chacune a sa ou ses villes principales qui sont de petites capitales locales. Il n'y a pas de tradition centraliste en Occitanie<sup>1</sup>.  
(partitoccitan.free.fr/pocqfp1.htm accessed 16/05/04)

Given the lack of support for political Occitanism, the whole issue seems somewhat hypothetical, but it does serve as further evidence of the extent to which the question of

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<sup>1</sup> Toulouse can be considered as the capital. But as Occitania is a collection of regions, each has its chief town or towns which are small local capitals. There is no centralist tradition in Occitania.

territory and territorial divisions has created problems, and reveals some of the internal inconsistencies of the movement.

A further example of the impact of territorial factors is the situation regarding the Occitan territory beyond the French frontiers. Whilst stating in its manifesto (see Chapter 4) that its aim is the creation of wide-ranging autonomy for Occitania for the whole of the area of the Occitan language, including the Occitan alpine valleys currently under Italian rule and the Val d'Aran in the Spanish state, the Partit Occitan never suggests precisely how a homogeneous grouping of all such territory should be brought about. There are few references to this issue in the internal bulletins. It has been suggested that some kind of association should be negotiated in the European context, leading to an 'intégration dans leur région d'origine'<sup>1</sup> (Limoges committee P.Oc. IB 38 August 1993: 3). The Partit Occitan has however had to recognize that within those areas individually greater autonomy has been gained at both a political and cultural level, than has been attained within France. In the final section of this chapter a brief examination is made of the explanations for this relative success, as they serve to focus on issues which highlight the reasons for the difficulties within France.

## **7.6 Occitania beyond the French frontiers**

The two trans-frontier Occitan areas, the Val d'Aran in Spain, and fourteen Alpine valleys in Italy<sup>2</sup>, consist of remote mountain communities. The language and culture thus survived further into the twentieth century than within France, because their isolation protected them from outside influences.

The Occitan Alpine valleys in Italy are mostly within the provinces of Cuneo and Turin in Piedmont, plus some communes in the province of Imperia in Liguria. Although the language, which the population considered to be Provençal, like that of their neighbours on the other side of the Alps, survived in these agricultural communities, there was no real

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<sup>1</sup> Integration into their original region.

<sup>2</sup> There also exists the anomaly of the small community of Guardia Piemontese in Calabria, southern Italy. This has maintained its Occitan language since its settlement by refugees from religious persecution at the time of the Waldensian heresy.

awareness of their own ethnic identity until the 1960s. At the same time as the ethnic revival was occurring in France, a number of intellectuals and linguists started to promote the 'Provençal-Piedmontese' culture. This was seen as distinct from a specifically Occitan culture, a fact which was emphasized by their use of the Mistralian written form, rather than the standardized Occitan form (De La Pierre 1993a: 51). In the 1970s the MAO (Movimento Autonomista Occitano), founded in 1968, adopted the terms of the political Occitanist debate in France (De La Pierre 1993a: 52), and focussed more on the economic and administrative situation. The MAO's links with French Occitania were fostered by the fact that it was influenced by the ideas of Fontan, the founder of the PNO, who had 'exiled' himself in Italian Occitania after facing problems in France. Not as extreme as Fontan, it advocated the establishment of a region of Italian Occitania, with a great deal of autonomy at economic, administrative and linguistic levels, rather than national independence (De La Pierre 1993a: 54). In its analysis of the economic marginalisation of the Italian Occitan valleys in the late 1960s and 1970s, as people left to find work in the new industrialized areas of the Piedmontese plain, and touristic speculation invaded the valleys, the MAO came close to the paradigm of internal colonialism. It entered into the electoral arena, and in the 1970s had some representatives elected to local councils, and as mayors (De La Pierre 1993a: 55). As Matteodi, the Secretary General of the MAO, pointed out during a meeting with members of the Partit Occitan, in spite of the centralism of the Italian state the system of proportional representation (which existed until 1994) presented opportunities for smaller parties (P.Oc. IB 25 September 1990: 6). The MAO also exploited the possibilities presented by regional laws, for example that of April 1990 supporting the promotion of the original linguistic heritage of Piedmont (De La Pierre 1993a: 56).

At its 1989 Congress the MAO spoke of its success in the previous twenty years in diffusing the idea of Occitanism, and its growing influence on public opinion and local administration, but adopted a more flexible ideological stance for the future. It distanced itself from the PNO, the 'father' party across the Alps, and advocated a greater openness to contact with all the autonomist forces in Italy. The economic and ecological revitalization of the mountain valleys, in cooperation with the Greens, became a key point of their programme (De La Pierre 1993a: 57). They also encouraged economic and cultural links with the Provençal side of the Alps, and involvement in European projects for revitalization



of the area (Salvi 1998: 131). By 2000, Ines Cavalcanti, one of the founders of MAO, stated:

Oggi, il MAO non esiste più, anche se formalmente non è mai stato sciolto...tutti noi militanti della prima ora – siamo rimasto in pochi – lavoriamo all'interno delle più diverse iniziative<sup>1</sup>. ( De La Pierre 2000).

The decline of the political activity of MAO was concurrent with the growth of support for the Lega Nord, which has come to gain about fifty per cent of the votes in the valleys, although its autonomist programme proposes independence for an area based on Lombardy, and the economic strength of the Lombardy plain, and does not take into account Occitan ethnic factors (Salvi 1998: 32). The Lega Nord has some aspects in common with the Front National in France, and in the same way as the latter has diverted possible supporters from Occitan political activity.

Such benefits as the Occitan communities have gained have come from the decision of the Italian government in 1999 to apply Article 6 of the constitution, which obliges the Republic to protect with suitable measures its linguistic minorities. Until that point only German in South Tyrol and French in Aosta had special status. It recognized twelve linguistic minorities, including Occitan. The law demands action on the part of populations and municipalities. At least 15% of the people who live in a commune must ask for the application of the text in the their commune. The demand can be validated if at least one third of the councillors of the commune agree. If accepted the regional language can be used as both a taught and a teaching language in nursery, primary and secondary education. It is not however compulsory, as parents can choose to opt out their children. The language can be used in municipal councils and local administration, although a translation into Italian must be available for anyone who asks for it. Place names and personal names in the regional language are permitted. Access to the languages in the media is improved, although as the funding comes mainly from the region rather than the state, this can be restricted in poorer regions (La Setmana 234 15 December 1999: 4). A few weeks before the new law was applied, 100 of the 120 Occitan communes had already chosen to declare themselves as Occitan (La Setmana 282 16 November 2000: 3). This appears to be a way

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<sup>1</sup> Today MAO no longer exists, even if it has never been formally dissolved....All our militants from the early days – we remained a small group- are working within the most varied initiatives.

of supporting a local identity, but in no way suggests that any desire exists for the formalization of links with French Occitania, other than the cultural links which some groups had established since the 1970s.

Occitan territory within the Spanish state consists of the small area of the Val d'Aran, a region of forests and pastures on the northern slopes of the Pyrenees, with a population of around six thousand inhabitants in 1991, although in recent years the figure grows significantly at times as a result of tourism. Although it is within the region of Catalonia, it is closer to Toulouse than to Barcelona (Institut de sociolinguística Catalana 2003). The language spoken is a variant of Gascon, and survived in common usage because of the isolation of this rural area, which also contributed to the 'fort sentiment d'identité aranais'<sup>1</sup> (Viaut 1989: 62). Since 1979 the Val d'Aran has gradually become the Occitan region in which the language and culture have achieved most recognition. This has been gained not as the result of militant action, but because, firstly, of the benefits gained from its existence within Spain, which became 'a partire dalla morte di Franco e dal ritorno della democrazia all'avan guardia nella politica linguistica democratica nell'Europa occidentale'<sup>2</sup> (Salvi 1998: 45). Secondly, administratively it is within the Generalitat of Catalonia, which in its Statute of Autonomy, as well as declaring that Catalan and Castilian were both official languages, declared in Article 4 that the Aranais language should both be taught, and the object of particular respect and protection. Thirdly, these measures were acting upon 'un terrain favorable dans cette région où la langue locale s'emploie encore au quotidien, de la maison à la banque et à la mairie'<sup>3</sup> (Viaut 1989: 59). The traditions and institutions of the valley granted in the fourteenth century survived until 1834, when the Conselh Generau was abolished. When in 1932 Catalonia received its first autonomy statute there were no special concessions for the Val d'Aran, but the 1979 Statute, as well as guaranteeing the protection of the language, provided for the re-establishment of the Conselh Generau. This occurred in 1990, when the Catalan parliament adopted the law establishing the special régime for the valley, granting considerable autonomy at the administrative, linguistic,

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<sup>1</sup> Strong feeling of Aranais identity.

<sup>2</sup> After the death of Franco and the return of democracy at the forefront of democratic linguistic policy in western Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Favourable terrain, where the local language is still in everyday usage, from home to bank to town hall.

cultural and economic levels (Ousitanio Vivo 6 31 August 1990:1). A number of measures had already been taken, including the establishment of a commission to standardize the spelling of the language and to promote actively the use of the language in all aspects of private and public life (Viaut 1989: 60). When the proposal was made to introduce its use within the legal system from April 2001, this was hailed as a significant step by Occitanists in France, who felt that though it was within a small community, it had symbolic value (La Setmana 267 22/08/2000: 2).

In spite of the positive situation for Occitan in the Val d'Aran, it does not seem however that there is any prospect of a move on the part of the Aranais to become part of French Occitania politically. It was attached to France for only a brief period, from its annexation by Napoleon in 1808, when it became part of the département of Haute Garonne, until its return to Spain in 1815 (Viaut 1989: footnote to p.74). Although the language is a variant of the Gascon dialect of Occitan, in most official documents it is referred to as Aranais. Viaut, the author of a study of the language<sup>1</sup>, states that the title of Occitan is less used, and is seen 'par certains comme une entité axée sur le Languedoc'<sup>2</sup>, and represents a possible linguistic and cultural centralism. Paradoxically, the title Occitan is sometimes perceived as being too French. Viaut points out that though there are some Aranais Occitanists who do promote the use of the word Occitan to describe their language, it is as a means of further validating it in the face of competition from Catalan and Castilian (Viaut 1989: 71). Although the spokesman had an interest in his statement, politically it seems true that:

Les Aranais sont Occitans de langue et de culture. Ils sont catalans comme les habitants du Principat sont espagnols, ou ceux de Roussillon sont français'<sup>3</sup>. (The head of the Catalan Education Service, 1988, cited in Viaut 1989: 73)

They have gained from Catalonia the recognition of their language and greater autonomy than any other Occitan community. It is true that the benefits gained will not necessarily be permanent. The agricultural economy of the valley has largely been replaced by tourism from elsewhere in Spain. Many of the young now leave the valley to study or work elsewhere in Catalonia. Castilian and Catalan therefore are gaining ground. Though

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<sup>1</sup> L'occitan gascon en Catalogne espagnole: le val d'Aran, du vernaculaire au formel. Bordeaux MSHA 1987.

<sup>2</sup> By some as being focussed on Languedoc.

<sup>3</sup> The Aranais are culturally and linguistically Occitan. They are Catalan, as the inhabitants of Catalonia are Spanish, and those of Roussillon are French.

Aranais is taught as a compulsory co-equal third language in the schools, there is still a shortage of teachers trained to teach in the language at secondary level (Har/Far 18 September 2000: 21). Viaut concludes that the progress made 'peut être infléchié au gré de fluctuations politiques locales et / ou tutélaires catalanes'<sup>1</sup>(Viaut 1989: 74). Nevertheless, its strong local identity, and the positive gains from its association with Catalonia, mean that there is no incentive for the Val d'Aran to militate in favour of incorporation into any hypothetical Occitan autonomous community.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated in this chapter that the claims of political Occitanism, to create a single Occitan community, whether at one extreme in the form of an independent state as advocated by the Parti Nationaliste Occitan, or as an autonomous community within a federal state of the German or Spanish type, are negated by the fact that there is no factor, other than the Occitan language, which integrates the extensive territories concerned. The language itself is no longer a potential source of identity-creation, as demographic change reduces the population for whom it has meaning. Geographically and economically different regions of Occitania have their own identities, and it has proved impossible for the small number of Occitan militants to create a shared identity, in the way in which this exists, for example, in Corsica, Catalonia or the Basque country. The situations of the Val d'Aran and the Occitan valleys of Italy, though territorially insignificant, have been investigated as they illustrate a number of points. Firstly, they highlight the fact that the ethnic language and culture are retained for longer in an enclosed and separate community, as happened in Corsica. Secondly, even these communities are undergoing, at a later stage than in French Occitania, the process of homogenization due to labour movement, tourist development and the influence of the mass media. Thirdly, they reveal that where the benefits of greater political and cultural autonomy have been attained, it is as a result of changes in the broader political environment, and not as the result of the work of a small group of militants. It is this 'political opportunity structure', 'the environment in which ethnoregionalist parties operate' (De Winter 1998: 242), which is investigated in the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> May be altered as a result of local and / or Catalan political changes.

## Chapter 8 Political factors

### 8.1 Introduction

The potential for the successful attainment of the political objectives of the Occitan ethnoregionalist movement was, like all such movements, subject to the constraints of the state system within which it operated, and the level of amenity towards the idea of the granting of greater autonomy to its regional minorities. In the case of France, for historical reasons, traditionally the state has adopted an inflexible attitude to such claims (as discussed in Chapter 3.2). It is not the purpose of this chapter to analyze here factors which are common to all the French ethnoregionalist movements, but rather to focus on certain aspects of the French political environment which had a particular impact on the Occitan movement during the period under review. The main theme of the chapter is that of the recuperation<sup>1</sup> of Occitan ideas by other groups within the French political arena. In the first case, the recuperation of Occitan themes by the French left during the 1970s can be seen as a positive achievement for Occitanism, allowing it to fulfill the tribune function of exerting pressure on major political parties in order to win them over to at least aspects of the autonomist cause (Seiler 1982: 24). Two specific aspects of French political life during the 1980s and 1990s were more negative in their effects on the Occitan political movement, and, it is argued here, resulted in undermining it and condemning it to the sidelines of political life. These were the recuperation of Occitan themes by hexagonal local government politicians, after the Defferre decentralization reforms; and their recuperation by the Front National as an adjunct to its campaign exploiting the demographic situation in southern France to increase its hold on political life.

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<sup>1</sup> An explanation of the use of the word 'recuperation' in this context is called for. In French political circles the word 'récupérer' has come into common usage since its use in an article in *L'Express* in 1965, to mean 'détourner de son sens et annexer quelque chose (action, mouvement d'opinion) ou quelqu'un (groupe ou individu) autonome à l'origine' (Petit Robert 1987). The Collins Robert dictionary, 6<sup>th</sup> edition 2002, defines it to mean in political pejorative usage 'to take over, to hijack, a person or movement, and to 'cash in' on a situation or event, and thus turn it to one's own advantage. This usage of the word 'recuperate' with the subtext of appropriation for one's own ends, has subsequently come to be accepted in English writing about French politics.

## **8.2 The relationship between the Occitan movement and the French left, and the effects of the decentralization process on the movement**

The history of the links between Occitanists and the French left between 1968 and 1981 appears in Chapters 3.3.6 and 4.2.5. To summarize, most of the Occitanists of the post 1968 period were involved with the French left, whether PSU, PS or PCF. In some cases this took the form merely of sympathy with socialist or Marxist ideology (as in the case of Lafont), in other cases there was active membership of one of the parties of the left, a situation which was made possible by the acceptance of the principle of ‘double appartenance’, which until 1982 allowed membership of VVAP and another political organization. The cooperation with the left removed the independence of the Occitanists at the same time as it made it more likely that they would achieve some of their objectives (Keating 1986: 29). It was an awareness of the dangers of ‘inféodation’, allegiance to the hexagonal left, which led the Partit Occitan to adopt a line of independence from other political parties. The purpose of this section is to draw attention briefly to the nature of the influence of the Occitanists on the Parti Socialiste, and to suggest that as a result the Occitanists gained from the relationship at least some measure of success, however limited and indirect.

Balme has claimed that in contrast with Spain, Italy and Belgium, regionalization was put in place in France without a direct link with regionalism, ‘demands for autonomy impelled by ethnic and cultural factors’ (Balme 1995: 169). Although it is certainly true that, as authors such as Keating have pointed out, the Defferre decentralization measures amounted largely to a ‘top-down’ process, the contribution of ‘ideological contagion’ (Keating 1992: 74) from regionalist groups should not be underestimated. In the preface to ‘La France au pluriel’, Mitterrand claimed that the socialists supported decentralization as ‘un moyen essentiel de rendre le pouvoir aux citoyens, de leur permettre, là où ils vivent, là où ils travaillent, de décider ce qui est bon pour eux et pour la collectivité’<sup>1</sup> (Parti Socialiste 1981: 10). This clearly shows the influence of the philosophy of *Volem Viure al País* (see Chapter 4.2). Lafont argues that ‘sans être membre d’aucun parti—toujours indépendant,

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<sup>1</sup> An essential means of returning power to the citizens, of allowing them, where they live, where they work to decide what is right for them and the community.

mais plutôt de gauche, socialiste'<sup>1</sup> (Lafont interview November 4 2003), he worked with the left until the candidature of Mitterrand, and that the Occitan movement by its influence contributed to the Defferre legislation. He points out that he was one of the first consulted by Mitterrand after his arrival at the Elysée, and at that point it appeared that much of the regionalists' claims were accepted, including the teaching of regional languages, but that subsequently they were modified.

Although Occitanists can, and do, claim an input into the decision-making process which led to the socialist decentralization process, the latter did not substantially improve the potential for the attainment of further autonomy as proposed by the Occitan movement. Although aimed at reducing the central state's domination over the periphery, the legislation did not fundamentally challenge the unitary nature of the state. It was effected within the terms of Article 1 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, the new territorial authorities were not autonomous, and the actions of the elected representatives at the local level could not infringe or undermine state prerogatives or national interests (Burdeau 1984). 'Unlike Germany or Belgium, France remains a unitary system of government, at liberty to increase or reduce the prerogatives of local government in accordance with the perceived interest of the centre' (Cole 1998: 131). The decentralization measures 'constituted a partial, primarily negative revolution' which managed to 'fracture the existing institutional order', but which did not carry out 'the more controversial proposals being debated at the time' such as eliminating the departmental level of government, reducing the number of municipalities, or reforming the system of local taxation (Levy 2001: 94-95). Nevertheless, although the reforms were not as extensive as many had hoped for, rather than enhancing a popular demand for more, they had the effect of reducing the potential audience for Occitan claims, at precisely the time that the Partit Occitan was creating a manifesto which advocated genuine autonomy for Occitania. As Coulon stated, in a survey of the state of the movement in 1989:

La régionalisation nous a, à bien des égards, coupé l'herbe sous les pieds; elle a rendu moins pertinentes et moins légitimes aux yeux de toute une opinion nos critiques de la centralisation<sup>2</sup>. (Coulon 1989:5)

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<sup>1</sup> Without being a member of any party, always independent, but leaning to the left, socialist.

<sup>2</sup> Regionalisation has in many respects cut the ground from under our feet; it has made our criticisms of centralization less pertinent and less relevant in the eyes of public opinion.

This was a recognizable response. De Winter points out that in Great Britain and Belgium, the electoral success of ethnoregionalist parties in the 1960s and early 1970s was linked to the fact that at that time the traditional parties were not responding to regionalist and linguistic demands, and that once the latter began to support claims for a greater degree of autonomy, the transfer of votes to the ethnoregionalist parties was reduced (De Winter 1998: 219). Although not an exact parallel, as in the case of the Occitan movement it is only levels of support and not pre-existing electoral success to which Coulon is referring, it is true that the recuperation of certain ethnoregionalist claims by the Parti Socialiste had the effect of satisfying moderate members of the Occitan movement, who then abandoned militancy, and either joined, or supported the PS, a fact which is referred to a number of times in the late internal bulletins of VVAP, and earlier ones of the Partit Occitan.

It was also the case that the Defferre legislation changed the French political scene in ways which were subsequently damaging to the prospects of political Occitanism. The decision by the remnants of the 1970s Occitanists to enter the electoral arena formally as a political party, by the creation of the Partit Occitan in 1987 (see Chapter 4.3), with hindsight can be seen as being of doubtful wisdom, for a number of reasons which subsequently became apparent. Firstly, the need to legitimate the enhanced role of the regions led to regional presidents in Occitania recuperating Occitan themes, and subverting them for new purposes. In competition with regional notables, the heads of major municipal councils, particularly in Toulouse and Montpellier, did likewise. Furthermore, the development of links between administrative regions in Occitania, for example the scheme Grand Sud, for the purpose of economic development, meant that in one sense hexagonal politicians achieved in the national context some of the objectives the Occitan movement proposed in the context of regional autonomy for Occitania. Secondly, though the decision initially to elect the new regional councillors by proportional representation led to the prospect of minor parties gaining enhanced power, in terms of numbers of elected representatives, and the potential to influence policy as the major parties sought to create coalitions to create working majorities, it was the Front National and not regionalist parties which emerged as the beneficiary of this process. Although not quantifiable, there is a case for stating that the dramatic growth of the Front National in certain large sections of Occitan territory meant



that the potential audience for Occitanist claims was reduced. These issues are discussed below.

### **8.3 The recuperation of Occitan themes by hexagonal politicians**

One result of decentralization was that the regions, which had been created in 1972, with boundaries which were in some cases rather artificial, now had the opportunity to adopt a more major and independent role, as the control by regional prefects was removed, and a directly elected executive was created (Cole 1998:124). The regional presidents sought to establish a specific and recognizable identity for their region, particularly as the legislation left the departmental level of government in a strong and in some cases competing situation. To do so they often drew upon cultural symbols and themes from the past. Within Occitania, this was particularly the case in Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon. As Coulon stated:

Le capital culturel occitan, accumulé au fil des années de militantisme, est aujourd'hui souvent utilisé par des forces étrangères au mouvement occitan...De telles pratiques sont dans la logique de la décentralisation, qui pousse les Régions à se légitimer, à se chercher des racines et une culture<sup>1</sup>. (Coulon 1989: 6-7)

Midi-Pyrénées is the largest French region, but a survey carried out by the Conseil Régional in 1987 found it was the least well known by the French (Morin 1989: 101). As it is also a very heterogeneous territory, it became a priority for the regional council to create some form of unity, and a specific identity. Dominique Baudis, as first elected president, began by changing the flag to a red flag with the gold cross of Languedoc, the emblem of the Occitanists, and a reference to the fact that parts of Midi-Pyrénées had been part of the historic province of Languedoc. The 'logo', for such it was, involved in the 're-branding' of the region, appeared on all official buildings, documents and publications financed by the region, and also on advertising material for timetables of regional lines of SNCF, posters promoting local wine, tourist posters etc. In 1988 the law limiting the cumul des mandats, multiple office holding, obliged Baudis to leave the presidency to devote himself

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<sup>1</sup> The Occitan cultural capital, built up through the years of militantism, is often used today by forces foreign to the Occitan movement...Such practices are in the logic of decentralization, which drives the regions to legitimate themselves, to search for roots and a culture.

to his roles as Mayor of Toulouse and député (Morin 1989:105). He was replaced as President by Marc Censi, who continued what the Occitanists called critically, ‘un occitanisme de façade’<sup>1</sup>, which ossified the culture in a static and out-moded fashion (Vilotte 1995: 4), whilst Baudis adopted a similar approach as Mayor of Toulouse. Safran states that one effect of decentralization was the rise of a new kind of mayor in the big cities, ‘more dynamic, more managerial, and more charismatic’ (Safran 2003: 278). Baudis, and Georges Frèche in Montpellier, are examples of such men who promoted for example grandiose building projects as part of their ambitious desire for personal fame (Safran 2003: 278). They appropriated some aspects of Occitanism to reinforce their municipal identity, and contribute to their personal political profile. Hammel, in his study of the regional languages and cultures of Languedoc-Roussillon stated that the elected officers were sensitive to the pressure exerted by the Occitan and Catalan movements, and feared a possible destabilization of the local political situation, but that their response was fundamentally conservative. He argued that Censi in Midi-Pyrénées and Jacques Blanc, President of Languedoc-Roussillon supported regional languages as ‘un aspect de stratégies politiques formulées en fonction de la base électorale des élus et de leurs stratégies de carrière’<sup>2</sup> (Hammel 1996: 51).

Blanc was a particularly controversial figure for the Occitanists. The fact that he, like Censi, was of the right, meant that he was inevitably suspect to the majority of Occitanists who were of the left. In particular, his willingness to accept the support of the Front National to help him maintain his presidency in 1992 and 1998 (see section 8.5) meant that he was vilified by some, and led for example to demonstrations in Montpellier to demand his resignation (La Setmana 147 March 26 1998:3). He agreed to devote a proportion of the regional budget to regional languages and culture, and played a major part in negotiating with the Mayor of Béziers the financial arrangement which made possible the building of CIRDOC, the Occitan library and documentation centre which replaced CIDO. At the inauguration of CIRDOC in June 1999 Blanc prefaced his speech with a few words in Occitan, and affirmed that the region would continue to take action in support of Occitan

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<sup>1</sup> A sham Occitanism.

<sup>2</sup> An aspect of political strategies drawn up according to their electoral base and with regard to their career strategies.

and Catalan (La Setmana 212 July 7 1999: 10). The use of Occitan symbols to promote the identity of cities and regions, and the contributions from the regional budgets to promote regional culture, obviously raised the profile of Occitanism as well as heightened the profile of the politicians concerned, but it had its limitations. Even the practical aid to regionalists was circumscribed. Hammel noted that the region tended to subsidize some regionalist organizations and not others, and to support actions with a lot of visible influence, especially on the media, for example festivals and exhibitions, rather than linguistic research, documentation or routine activities (Hammel 1996: 104-105).

As well as the recuperation of the cultural and linguistic themes referred to above, another aspect of the post-decentralization administrative set-up has been the fact that some aspects of the Partit Occitan's political and economic policies have been carried out by the regional councils of Occitania, and in some cases by individual cities, without reference to the ethnic dimension. Regional councils took advantage of the fact that the new legislation permitted free inter-regional cooperation, and the right to organize regular contact with foreign decentralized communities with which they shared a common frontier (Jeanjean 1992: 147). Soon after the first regional elections the Presidents of Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon met and initiated the idea of the Grand Sud to cooperate in order to deal with shared problems, for example the 'enclavement', isolation or hemming in of the southern regions in the context of the whole of the national territory, and concerns about the fragility of their agriculture facing the enlargement of the European Economic Community (Morin 1989: 104). This was later extended to include Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur.

As stated in Chapter 4.3, one aspect of the Partit Occitan's policies was the European dimension. By cooperating with other regional minority groups within the European Free Alliance, and gaining access to the European Union decision-making process, they hoped to secure gains not accessible from the central state. It was the case, however, that the Presidents of certain Occitan regional councils were already initiating trans-frontier cooperation to encourage growth in cultural and economic contacts, and to promote European integration and the rebalancing of Europe to the advantage of the southern regions. In 1991 a charter signed by the presidents of Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon and Catalonia instituted the Eurorégion (Morata 1996:122). Prior to this

Toulouse and Montpellier had joined with other regional political and administrative capitals, Barcelona, Palma, Zaragossa and Valence to form the C6 group of cities, formalized by the Declaration of Zaragossa in 1991, to support economic growth (Morata 1996:121). A geographically wider group, more focussed in its aims, was the Arc Méditerranéen des Technologies, set up in 1990 to develop technological cooperation between Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Catalonia, Valence, Liguria, Lombardy and Piedmont (Morata 1996: 125). Although such schemes were in line with the Partit Occitan's aim of regional regeneration, they had the disadvantage from the Occitanist perspective, as Lavelle points out, of tending to perpetuate the division of Occitania, made by geographers, into three distinct entities, the Midi-méditerranéen, the south-west, and Auvergne-Limousin (Lavelle 2004: 549). They also, like the granting of some degree of decentralized administrative control over the region, had the effect of 'cutting the ground from beneath the feet' of the Occitanists, and leaving them with little new and original to propose, other than their most extreme ideas, which were acceptable only to a small minority.

#### **8.4 The impact of the rise of the Front National**

Türsan states that 'ethnoregionalist parties build upon the recent outbursts of disaffection of electorates with existing political élites and traditional party politics' (Türsan 1998: 2). When the decision was taken by members of the Occitan movement to enter formally into the electoral arena, with the establishment of the Partit Occitan in 1987, this potential to benefit from the support of dealigned voters was greatly reduced because it occurred at the point at which Front National, which had begun to make its impact in the early 1980s, was reinforcing its hold in southern Occitania. As Cole points out, the Front National does not only appeal to its core extreme-right constituency, but 'is a party which is used as a protest vehicle for a variety of different discontents with the existing political parties and political system, and with French society in general' (Cole 1998: 179). A number of factors contributed to the growth of the Front National nationally, but within Occitania it was able to draw upon a substratum of right wing support which had long existed particularly in Languedoc and Provence. The south of France has often been described as the 'Midi rouge', a term which, as Lerner notes, came into common usage around 1900 to indicate the

existence of a political outlook based on ‘un attachement viscéral à la gauche’<sup>1</sup> (Lerner 1980: 203). He goes on to illustrate that this was always an over-simplification, with the existence of left/right allegiance being influenced by complex cleavages based on social class, religion, economic structure, and rural or urban base. Sagnes, in ‘Le Midi rouge: mythe et réalité’, developed this point, and illustrated that there has been a ‘Midi blanc’ vigorously opposing the Midi rouge during the twentieth century. He cites examples such as the levels of support given to Maurras and Action Française in the 1930s, for Poujade in 1956, and for Tixier-Vignancourt in the 1965 presidential elections (Sagnes 1982:16). Since the 1960s, the existence of a population of ‘pieds noirs’, repatriated after Algerian independence, and of a large immigrant community, largely of North African origin (see Chapter 7.4), has provided a source of confrontation which has encouraged the growth of right wing views.

It is not possible to make any quantitative judgments on the extent to which the Front National attracted potential Partit Occitan voters, and therefore eroded the latter’s initial impact, however some comparison can be made with the situation of ethnoregionalist parties in other countries. De Winter points out that in both Belgium and the United Kingdom the electoral breakthrough of ethnoregionalist parties came at a time ‘when no other significant protest parties competed for the votes of those who were discontented with the main governmental parties’. In the case of Belgium the growth of the Greens and extreme right parties, and in the UK the Greens and the revived Liberal Democrat third party eroded the ethnoregionalist vote (De Winter 1998: 219). There is at least a case for saying that the existing implantation of the Front National in Provence and Languedoc, and their recuperation of some Occitan themes (see below), reduced to some extent the numbers who might have been persuaded to vote for the Partit Occitan as a protest vote.

The timing of the Front National breakthrough in Occitania, like that of the decision by the Occitanists to form a new political party, is linked to the opportunities presented by the decentralization reforms, and changes in the nature of the electoral system. It was the Front National which benefited from the new situation. The first regional elections by universal suffrage were held in 1986. The regional councillors were elected by proportional

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<sup>1</sup> A deep rooted attachment to the left.

representation, which enabled the Front National to gain seats, and enter into the coalition building which became a feature of the regional electoral process. As Keating has pointed out, parties with a national base have been more successful than regionalist ones in the regional elections, which have tended to be dominated by national issues, and 'generally regional parties have played a negligible role even in regions with a strong historic identity, like Brittany' (Keating 1998: 100). In any case, by the time the *Partit Occitan* participated in elections the Front National had established a firm base in the southern part of Occitania. Research carried out soon after the 1986 elections indicated some of the reasons for this. Viard stated that Marseille had become 'la capitale nationale du FN...le Midi Rouge...s'achève sous nos yeux'<sup>1</sup>(Viard 1987: 57). In the regional elections the FN became the first party of the city. In the legislative elections, held the same day, the vote for the FN attained up to 38% in certain polling areas (Viard 1987: 61). Viard attributed the level of support for the FN to a correlation with the levels of unemployment and of immigrants in certain areas of the city, even though he acknowledged that such a correlation was not always the case nationally (Viard 1987: 65). Cole makes a similar point, that psephological studies suggest that there is 'no easy correlation between FN support and the concentration of immigrants', but goes on to add that surveys carried out after elections have indicated that for FN voters the most significant political issues are immigration and security, and the equation of unemployment and immigrant figures made by Le Pen (Cole 1998: 177).

The analysis made by Alliès of the results of the 1986 elections in Languedoc-Roussillon led him to describe the electorate of the FN as being limited in the rural areas, and strong in the areas of geographical and demographic mobility, where unemployment was a factor in problems of social integration (Alliès 1987: 78). The areas of coastal development provided most of the highest scores for the FN, e.g. more than 20% at La Grande Motte (Alliès 1987: 80). Although there were no lists representative of an Occitan political party in the 1986 regional elections, there were, in five Occitan départements, lists which consisted of regionalists who incorporated the word Occitan, or Occitan words, in their title. Alcouffe compared the results obtained by these lists with the results of the FN.

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<sup>1</sup> The national capital of the FN...the Midi Rouge is coming to an end before our eyes.

|                      | FN    | Regionalist |                      |
|----------------------|-------|-------------|----------------------|
| Aude                 | 6.5%  | 1.07%       |                      |
| Haute Garonne        | 6.27% | 1.00%       |                      |
| Hérault              | 14.7% | 1.08%       |                      |
| Tarn                 | 9.72% | 2.05%       |                      |
| Pyrénées-Atlantiques | 6.84% | 1.53%       | (Alcouffe 1987: 113) |

This hold which the FN was establishing in Occitania in 1986 as an alternative vote was subsequently strengthened, particularly in Languedoc-Roussillon and Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur. It extended its influence not only in regional and European elections, held under proportional representation, but also in the municipal elections, held under the two round majoritarian system. In the 1995 municipal elections the FN gained control of Marignane, Orange and Toulon, in Provence, and in 1997 gained Vitrolles. The 1998 regional elections illustrated the extent to which the FN had gained a significant level of power, by its potential to help the classic right keep the presidency of the five Occitan regions which were managed by the right (Limousin was the exception). Although the left gained the largest numbers of seats in each region except Auvergne, the numbers were such that it was possible for the right to maintain control if an alliance with the FN could be negotiated (La Setmana 146 March 19 1998: 2). Although in Midi-Pyrénées and Provence the right resisted this option, in Languedoc-Roussillon Blanc entered into alliance with the FN to hold on to the presidency, as he had done in 1992. The figures for the FN vote in Occitania correlated with those noted in 1986 – the greatest level of support in départements to the East (28.99% in the Var), and along the coast, with a gradual decline in support the further west one went, and in the most rural areas (5.68% in Lozère, rural Languedoc) (La Setmana 147 March 26 1998: 2). The electoral results of the Partit Occitan in the 1998 regional elections were 2.31% Haute Garonne, 1.15% Tarn, and 1.12% Var (Partit Occitan 1998)

Do the figures for support for the FN within Occitania suggest that the FN has any bearing on the electoral progress of the Partit Occitan, other than the aforementioned one of providing a rival pre-existing well-entrenched party offering an electoral outlet for voters disillusioned with the existing political élite? Is there any evidence that the FN was attracting, or seeking to attract, potential ethnoregionalist voters, particularly as, as has been pointed out in Chapter 4, the Occitanist political constituency was largely to the left?

During the 1990s the FN began to recuperate some ethnoregionalist themes, particularly in Provence. This caused considerable concern to the *Partit Occitan*, for a number of reasons. It was observed that these themes were distorted, and aimed, paradoxically, at a reinforcement of French national identity, in line with the way in which during the Vichy period Pétain had encouraged, for example, regional languages (see Chapter 3.3.3). As such, they also distorted people's perceptions of the Occitanists. An unnamed 'militant occitan', in an article on the danger of recuperation of some of their ideas by the FN, complained that 'souvent j'ai entendu dire: tu es occitaniste, tu es d'extrême droite'<sup>1</sup> (*P.Oc. IB* 58 October 1997:4). More seriously, it was pointed out that the FN in Provence was exploiting 'regionalist' themes for racist and discriminatory purposes. The article cited *Le Pen*, on 'Le Téléphone Sonne' on France Inter, contrasting 'la culture provençale contre la culture rap'<sup>2</sup>, and the FN mayor of Toulon praising the Provençal markets compared to those of the Maghrebins. Blanchet notes that in the FN electoral propaganda document 'Régionales 1998, le changement tout simplement' there are frequent references to regional identities, the traditions of the provinces, regional roots, etc. (Blanchet 2000: 100). He observed that in the four municipalities in Provence held by the FN, the mayors and town councils had carried out a number of symbolic gestures linked to the regional culture. He cites (from *La Croix* August 1 1997) the view that such actions were purely for electoralist purposes, and points out that the majority of individuals involved with regional languages and culture consistently reject this recuperation, as being intrinsically in contradiction with the moral code which motivates them (Blanchet 2000:101). Blanchet concludes that though the FN is clearly using regional cultures as part of a strategy of political propaganda, using them in opposition to Maghrebin immigration and an Islamic culture, it is the case that some who are attached to regional and minority cultures could, either through naivety or quite consciously, be tempted by an extreme right wing discourse (Blanchet 2000:109).

There is a certain amount of evidence that the latter is the case. This emerges clearly from a letter published in the journal of the *Partit Occitan*. The editorial team had hesitated as to whether they should publish it, but decided to do so in order to illustrate what they did not

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<sup>1</sup> Often I've heard: you are an Occitanist, you belong to the extreme right.

<sup>2</sup> Provençal culture opposed to the culture of rap.



believe in, and to make it clear that the Occitanism of the author of the letter was not that as understood by the Partit Occitan. Its content is detailed here as it makes very clear the thought processes of those who were tempted by the FN discourse. The author, a doctor from Sète on the Languedoc coast, states that he believes a number of Occitanists have failed to recognize sufficiently the two major threats to them, the first being the impact of increasing Anglo-Saxon cultural standardization, and the second coming from the massive settlement of immigrants, essentially of Maghrebin origin. Stating that he has nothing against them as individuals, and that he does not treat patients according to the colour of their skin, he goes on to argue that they are victims of the system, which uproots them by luring them with the prospect of family allowances, and social security for all. He then states that it is blindness to speak of racism on the part of native Occitans, when it is a question of a popular reflex of survival, in the face of an excessive immigrant population in the council flats, the schools, the hospitals and the prisons. He concludes that it is not surprising that Occitan citizens are mobilizing in favour of the FN, which proposes to halt immigration, and that the task of an Occitan movement is to take into account the interests of the Occitan citizens (Occitania 83 November-December 1991). This is far from the Partit Occitan's support for immigrant workers, who 'ont droit à l'exercice de tous les droits civiques que réclament les citoyens d'Occitanie'<sup>1</sup> (Tautil in Lo Cebier 9 December 1991: 3).

It is also the case that as well as the defection to the FN of Occitanists who display classic extreme right wing arguments, there is evidence of the defection of former left wing supporters. The existence of racist attitudes among PCF supporters has been documented. Schain (1987) highlighted the use by the PCF of anti-immigrant attitudes for political purposes in the 1980s, in the communist local authorities in the Paris region (Cole 1998: 176). It appears that the FN's association of statistics on unemployment with those on immigrant numbers provided an incentive for some PCF members to defect. Although statistical evidence is not available to reveal the extent of the defection from extreme left to extreme right in Occitania, Lafont clearly believes that this has occurred. When asked to comment on this issue, he recounted that when he meets up with some of the ex-miners,

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<sup>1</sup> Who have the right to exercise all the civic rights to which the citizens of Occitania are entitled.

communist at the time, with whom he demonstrated beneath the Occitan flag over the closure of the Adrecht mines in 1980, they apologize to him ‘excusez-nous, Robert – on vote FN!’<sup>1</sup> (Lafont interview November 4 2003). He attributed this to their disillusion over the economic policy of the socialist and PCF government after 1983. The miners had expected support, but after 1983 ‘public sector industries were instructed to become market successes, to restructure, and to make profits, and a wage and price freeze was decreed’ (Guyomarch 2001: 41). The most one can say is that the Partit Occitan in Languedoc and Provence is unable to compete with the electoral attractions of the FN.

As well as examining some of the ideological and sociological reasons why the FN has been successful in Occitania, it is worth drawing attention briefly to the contrast between the organizational structure of the FN and the Partit Occitan, in order to highlight the weaknesses of the latter. Ivaldi, in his study of the FN, emphasized the way in which Le Pen turned it into an effective electoral force by developing and reinforcing the whole party apparatus. This was able to mobilize political support, with a large number of fully-paid up members, including a hard core of committed grass roots campaigners, and a rigidly maintained party discipline (Ivaldi 1998: 44). Unlike the Partit Occitan (see Chapter 4.3.6) the FN has a sound financial base. This came initially from Le Pen’s personal fortune and subsequently from membership subscriptions, charges for admission to rallies, voluntary donations, and also from firms responsive to far-right lobbying (Ivaldi 1998: 59). Ivaldi, like other analysts, insists on the role played by Le Pen’s personal charismatic appeal, ability to impose his authoritarian will on the party hierarchy, and influence the media (Ivaldi 1998: 51). The contrast with leadership within the political wing of the Occitan movement is examined in the following chapter.

## **8.5 Chasse, Pêche, Nature et Tradition (CPNT)**

Attention should be drawn to the existence of another political organization which since 1989 has had the effect of draining support from one section of the potential electorate for Occitanist organizations. CPNT originated from a protest by hunters against ‘European

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<sup>1</sup> We’re sorry Robert – we vote FN.

directives and environmentalist associations' (Haegel 2005: 22), which they believed were depriving them of the liberty to carry out traditional rural pursuits. It gained some success in the 1998 regional elections and the 1999 European elections. As explained in Chapter 4.3.6 the Partit Occitan was aware that there were a number of people who though attracted by certain aspects of the Partit Occitan's policies, were also enthusiasts for the French passion for hunting, and who were alienated by the party's electoral alliances with the Verts. The existence of CPNT provided an electoral outlet for such people. Grosclaude, the leader of Entau Païs, described the effect of CPNT on the cantonal elections in Béarn in 1992:

(CPNT) tenait un discours lié à la tradition, la culture, l'identité. Cela nous a fait perdre des voix. On a été obligé de développer un discours plus radical pour se démarquer. Ils avaient une image de droite, et nous de gauche. Surtout, ils avaient les fédérations de chasse derrière eux.<sup>1</sup> (Chartier and Larvor 2004: 301)

The presence of CPNT in the electoral arena in some contests has had the effect, at least in rural areas, of fragmenting further an already small audience for policies linked to issues of regional identity and culture.

## 8.6 Concluding comments

This chapter has concluded that there were many aspects of the external political environment which during the 1980s and 1990s meant that the Occitan political movement had difficulties in making progress. The first was the fact that inspite of the Defferre decentralization measures France remained broadly committed to the principle of the indivisibility of the French Republic. The measures which were instituted were however sufficient to reduce to some extent the credibility of organizations campaigning against the excessive centralization of the French State. They had a demobilizing effect on membership of Occitan organizations. Furthermore, they provided the opportunity for hexagonal politicians to promote some of the economic and cultural themes which formed part of the Occitanists' policies, but devoid of their wider political aims, and their ethnic dimension. This has left only the Occitanists' more extreme idea, that of the creation of an

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<sup>1</sup> CPNT's discourse was linked to tradition, culture, identity. That lost us votes. We were obliged to develop a more radical discourse to differentiate ourselves from them. They had a right wing image, ours was left wing. Above all, they had the support of the hunters' federations.

autonomous Occitanian Community as being particularly distinctive. As has already been demonstrated in Chapter 7, this is perceived as unrealistic, or irrelevant, to most of the population concerned. During the same period the growth of the Front National, and to a lesser degree CPNT, have provided alternative, and in the former case more powerful, competitors for the support of a limited electoral constituency. As mentioned above, one major contributory cause of the effectiveness of the Front National in mobilizing support, has been the leadership style of Le Pen. Chapter Nine investigates the issue of leadership within the Occitan movement, and contends that it has been a significant factor in the movement's weakness.

## Chapter 9 Leadership

### 9.1 Introduction: political leadership

This chapter examines the role of leadership within the Occitan movement. It argues that certain aspects of the leadership have played a significant part in the failure of the movement to mobilize opinion in a sufficiently homogeneous and organized form to counter the inherent problems caused by the disparate nature of the extensive Occitan territory.

During the period 1974 to 2000 Robert Lafont, Yves Rouquette and Gustave Alirol played the most significant roles in influencing the direction of the Occitan movement. Their performance as leaders is considered against the requirements for effective leadership of ethnoregionalist groups. Heywood argues that political leadership involves the possession of personal characteristics, (often equated with charisma<sup>1</sup>), which enable the leader to exert influence over others, and 'patterns of behaviour', which provide the organizational input making possible the attainment of a set of specific goals. Effective leadership should thus be able to mobilize and inspire people, promote unity, and strengthen organizations (Heywood 2002: 348). De Winter analyses the specific qualities of leadership required for ethnoregionalist parties, and this provides an interesting framework for comparison, even though of the three only Alirol became the leader of a political party, the Partit Occitan. Lafont and Rouquette exercised their influence in a more informal way over the Occitan political structures which existed in the 1970s. Their influence was based on their personal attributes, which included their literary ability, rather than their organizational skills. De Winter points out that most ethnoregionalist parties were led for a long time by a single charismatic leader, often the founding father of the party (De Winter 1998: 222). It is argued here that Lafont undoubtedly played the role of founding father of post war Occitanism, even though his position was never consummated in the form of the creation of

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<sup>1</sup> Originally charisma was a theological concept, but it was introduced to the social sciences by Weber, referring to charm or personal power which enabled an individual to establish psychological control over others. In general usage it is considered to be an inherent personality trait, but in practice most successful leaders enhance their natural talent by honing their oratorical and presentational skills, and by effective manipulation of the media (Heywood 2002: 212).

his own party. Both Lafont and Rouquette possessed charismatic characteristics, so that as their interpretation of the political aims of the movement became increasingly diverse, the existence of two potential leaders acted as a counterproductive element in the attempt to mobilize support for Occitanism. Furthermore, it will be argued that aspects of the personality of both men meant that the organizational aspects of leadership referred to by Heywood were not able to be fulfilled.

Examples exist of leaders of ethnoregionalist groups who have successfully combined charismatic leadership with effective organizational political skills. Jordi Pujol is cited by De Winter as the archetype of the successful ethnoregionalist, who was able to delineate and interpret doctrine, and establish organization (De Winter 1998: 222). He was able to dominate Catalan nationalism by creating and dominating the *Convergencio Democratica de Catalunya* (Marcet and Argelaguet 1998: 77). Pujol was able to make the transition from a subversive role to emerge as the dominating force in Catalan government and politics, and then to play a role in Spanish national affairs, and in European politics (Payne 2000:100). He displayed keen political skills, adapting and modifying the party policy to reinforce its strengths, and maintaining control by the force of his personality, and the breadth of his vision which encompassed culture, economics and politics (Keating 1988:214). Whilst Pujol was able to work from an existing base of Catalan national feeling, Umberto Bossi on the other hand succeeded in creating an ethnoregionalist movement in a physical territory which lacked the common ethnic or linguistic traits which are usually regarded as the bedrock of such movements (Tarchi 1998: 144). He established the *Lega Nord* in Italy, and Tarchi argues that by the force of his personal charisma he maintained coherence in an organization which is described as being heterogeneous in its political profile. He created the ideological framework for a new party, and oversaw its subsequent modification, whilst creating an organizational structure which reinforces his primordial role (Tarchi 1998: 152-153). The Occitan movement has never produced an individual leader who has incorporated the charismatic personality traits plus the political nous of men such as Pujol and Bossi. Neither Lafont nor Rouquette showed the commitment, or even willingness, to impose a structure on their political ideals. Both were key figures in the cultural wing of the Occitan movement. Although in the case of Lafont

the judgement may be rather harsh, there is some truth in Keating's statement that the fact that writers have been prominent in the Occitan movement discouraged 'the development of serious economic and political thought' (Keating 1986: 30). In addition, as has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, during the 1970s, the period of Lafont and Rouquette's greatest influence, the Occitan movement was incorporated into social movement activity, and as Graumann points out, social movements resent hierarchical structures and dominating leader figures. They do however still need direction and structure (Graumann 1986:5).

## **9.2 An evaluation of the role and significance of Robert Lafont**

Robert Lafont has dominated the Occitan movement ever since the end of the Second World War. Although he did not found and lead a political party, his philosophy and theoretical input influenced a number of political organizations within the movement since 1971 – Lutte Occitane, VVAP, and more indirectly the Partit Occitan. The Italian Occitanist Sergio Salvi summarized the activities of Lafont, describing him as the most interesting author writing in Occitan, the major exponent of militant Occitanism, poet, storyteller, dramatist, essayist, philologist, historiographer, literary sociologist, university professor, and political organizer. He argues that Lafont's tireless activity was responsible for creating the political and cultural awareness of the young Occitan generation (Salvi 1998: 58).

It is necessary to refer to Lafont's career prior to 1974 to explain the impact which he came to have over the movement, and to clarify the issues which subsequently proved divisive within the movement during the period of the current study. Lafont was born in 1923 to a middle class family in Nîmes. As a young man he joined the Félibrige during the Second World War, but as this conservative group became increasingly associated with Pétain and his policies, he left it and became one of the few Occitanists in the Resistance. At the end of the war he made a major contribution to the establishment of the Institut d'Etudes Occitanes. Abrate comments on the significant effect of the war on the young generation of Occitanists in 1945. Unlike the generation of the 1930s, for whom Occitan nationalism

was a priority, the generation of 1945 had a feeling of ‘double appartenance’ to French and Occitan nationality. They adopted a deliberately apolitical stance, and it was two decades before this generation began to propose greater autonomy for Occitania (Abrate 2001: 402). Lafont played an important part in politicizing the IEO and establishing the Comité Occitan d’Etudes et d’Action. When the latter dissolved itself in 1971 to form the extreme left wing Lutte Occitane, Lafont became a member. As he developed his political views in the later 1950s and 1960s he broadly adopted a regionalist approach, rather than advocating true autonomy for Occitania. This issue became one which was later to create division between Lafont and Rouquette, and their respective supporters. Lafont summed up the difference between them as being that his dream was ‘faire la France autrement’, while Rouquette’s dream was ‘détruire la France,’<sup>1</sup>(Lafont interview November 4 2003). He went on to argue that it had always been his view that it was necessary to act within the constraints of society as it existed, and that there was no nationalist Occitan sentiment in the way that Catalan and Basque feeling existed. Lafont’s conception, and his view that the Occitanists should work in cooperation with the French left, provided an important orientation of the movement.

A second major contribution was the fact that Lafont created the main theoretical underpinning of the Occitan movement by his exposition of the theory of internal colonialism during the 1960s. As well as providing the ideological basis for most of the polemical Occitan writing of the 1970s it also influenced left wing radical regionalists in Corsica (Loughlin 1987: 251). Lafont’s views were developed in a large number of political works<sup>2</sup>, and in addition his extensive literary output contributed to the renaissance of the Occitan language. He undoubtedly fulfilled the aspect of leadership which involves the provision of a vision for his followers.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘to make France differently’ ‘to destroy France’

<sup>2</sup> La révolution régionaliste 1967

Sur la France 1968

Renaissance du Sud 1971

Décoloniser en France 1971

Le sud et la nord 1971

Clefs pour l’Occitanie 1971

Lettre ouverte aux Français d’un Occitan 1973

La revendication occitane 1974

Autonomie, de la région à l’autogestion 1976



The extent of Lafont's influence is revealed by the fact that in April 1974 he attempted to stand as a presidential candidate after the death of Pompidou, representing the minorities of France. Formaggio states that Lafont's candidature was not the result of his personal initiative, but had been envisaged before the death of Pompidou, promoted by Lutte Occitane and members of other national minorities in France. Although his candidature was rejected by the Conseil Constitutionnel, it nevertheless had a significant effect on the Occitan movement. The committees which had been established to support his candidature continued to mobilize, and became the committees of *Volem Viure al País*. This period seems to mark a high point of his leadership, when he was providing both a higher public profile for Occitanism, and the catalyst which was responsible for the creation of what was to become the most significant manifestation of political Occitanism during the 1970s (Touraine 1981a: 48). The seven themes which had been planned as the basis of Lafont's campaign became instead the core of the manifesto of VVAP, cited in Tautil's collection of Occitan texts (Tautil 1997: 23-30). In these circumstances it was a surprise to find on examination of the internal bulletins of VVAP that there was very little evidence of Lafont being directly involved in the activities of the committees. Touraine claims however that Lafont continued to influence the movement by his theoretical writings, in particular 'Autonomie, de la région à l'autogestion', which outlines the regionalist orientations of VVAP in its early stages (Touraine 1981a: 48-49). As during the course of the decade the friction between Lafont and Rouquette was exacerbated, Lafont's influence over the organization was in decline (see Chapter 4.2). It is interesting to note that in recent years Lafont has in effect tried virtually to erase VVAP from his record of the history of the movement. In his more recent publications he has downplayed and denigrated the contribution of VVAP, describing it as being impregnated by anti-communist nationalism aimed at destroying Lutte Occitane and leading to a suicidal isolation of the Occitan movement (Lafont 1991:120 and Lafont 2003: 216). When asked to comment on the impression gained from documentary sources that VVAP had the most impact during the 1970s, in conjunction with the viticulteurs, he first stated that for him the Adrecht miners' strike (1976-1981) was the most important thing, and that he 'thought he had been a member (of VVAP), but had been very sceptical' (Lafont interview November 2003). The fact that the dominating figure within the movement was increasingly out of step with the

main political expression of Occitanism, and that factions grew up around Lafont and around Rouquette, contributed to the weakness of the movement.

The rift between Lafont and Rouquette was even more explicit in the cultural field, within the IEO, when in November 1980 at the General Assembly at Aurillac a major confrontation led to the splitting of the organization which Lafont had co-founded, and the withdrawal of Lafont and his supporters, (see Chapter 5.3 ). From this point on Lafont's role in the active political life of the movement diminished further, and Gustav Alirol began to emerge as the prominent leader of what remained of VVAP, and then of the Partit Occitan. It was Alirol who was proposed as a possible presidential candidate in 1981 (VVAP Languedoc 29 1980: 3). Nevertheless Lafont has continued to have strong views on the political situation, and has contributed to journals such as *Amiras*, and later to *Occitania* and *La Setmana*. Just as he provided a theoretical justification for Occitanism in the late 1960s and 1970s, he has evolved a philosophy of a 'third wave' of Occitanism, (the first being that of the *Félibrige* up to 1914, the second wave from the 1920s to 1983), based on the recuperation of flexible and post-modern themes, the 'liberation' of space as a result of trans-state inter-regional politics, and the exploitation in a positive way of the situation created by globalization, which he argues is creating an 'après-France' and another arena of history (Lafont 1998: 10-11). This has contributed to the evolution of the political philosophy of the Partit Occitan, of which he is a member, (though with no official role), and has supported Alirol in a conception of Occitanism which has adapted to the 'new regionalism' of the 1990s as described by Keating, which is no longer contained within the framework of the nation state (Keating 1998: 73).

It has been made clear that a major part of Lafont's position as de facto leader of the Occitan movement lies in his intellectual dominance and his theoretical input. How far was this role supported by the charismatic personality traits which are regarded as integral to effective leadership? Writing in 1983 Zeldin described the Occitan movement as being 'precariously dominated by its leader Robert Lafont, who some find charismatic, while others argue bitterly against his tactics, or accuse him of behaving like the pope of the midi' (Zeldin 1983:18). A more recent newspaper article described him as the pope of Occitania, and stated that like the pope, he is often contested, but his authority is acknowledged by all.

It referred to him, at the age of 78, as more than ever the symbol of the Occitan cause (Matarèse 2001: 9). The latter phrase seems to sum up and explain the nature of his role. Many admirers testified as to his charismatic qualities. The author Jean-Luc Sauvaigo stated that ‘comme les Italiens avaient suivi Garibaldi, j’ai suivi Robert Lafont par amour pour l’homme bien plus que pour la cause’<sup>1</sup> (Matarèse 2001: 9). There is revealing evidence about Lafont’s personality in a film made in 2001, in which in a round table discussion Lafont was interviewed by Sauvaigo, Jean Yves Casanova, a former member of Lutte Occitane, and Danièle Julien, a former student. Julien stated that Lafont always had a seductive side, with many admirers around him. He had ‘une prestance, un sourire: il était très séducteur par l’image et par la parole’<sup>2</sup>. However she added that others hated him, as often happens with a person who has an exceptional aura (Film directed by Passuello 2001). Certainly evidence exists of criticism of his input to the movement. Remy Pech, an Occitanist academic, and expert on the Languedocian wine business, described Lafont not entirely admiringly as the ‘Napoléon de l’Occitanisme’. Writing about the journals which Lafont had initiated during his career, he says that they all resemble one another, and often have a short lifespan. He argues that their ephemeral existence is ‘peut-être due au jargon ésotérique dont on les gave’<sup>3</sup> (Pech 1982: 45). It is indeed true that some of his writing is not readily accessible to the general reader, as both in French and in Occitan he has a very elevated style. This provides substance to Rouquette’s argument that Lafont was too associated with the university milieu (Rouquette interview September 2002). In a review of ‘La revendication occitane’, a history of the movement up to 1974, Bertomieu advocated that Lafont should involve himself more actively in workers’ struggles, and lessen the intellectual bias of his work (Bertomieu 1975: 13).

Some studies of leadership have stressed that ‘extreme discrepancies between the intelligence of potential leaders and that of their followers militate(d) against the exercise of leadership’ (Bass 1981: 79). Any assessment of Lafont’s role as leader of the Occitan movement must take into account what seem valid criticisms that his intellectualism placed

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<sup>1</sup> Like the Italians followed Garibaldi, I followed Robert Lafont out of love for the man far more than for the cause.

<sup>2</sup> He had great presence, a smile: he was very seductive in image and speech.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps due to the indigestible esoteric jargon with which they are stuffed.

him on a more rarified plane than the majority of the activists and the population they were trying to influence. However it is also true that his personal charm and warmth enabled him to connect with working class contacts in spite of his academic capacities. ( There is evidence of this in archive film of his contact with the miners of the Adrecht, shown in the film by Passuello.) It has been stated that in the modern age charismatic appeal can however be further enhanced and manipulated by skilful use of media opportunities (Heywood 2002: 352), but Lafont has been criticized for not coming over well on the television in spite of his capacity to mobilize crowds (Matarèse 2001: 10)

Other aspects of Lafont's character reduced his effectiveness as a political leader. Rejai and Phillips argue that the ability to articulate a vision so as to attract a significant following must be supplemented by the ability to organize and mobilize the followers to make possible the realization of the vision (Rejai and Phillips 1997: 9). In spite of Lafont's attempt to stand as a presidential candidate in 1974, and his role as an advisor to Mitterrand on regionalist matters during the 1970s, there is some evidence to suggest that Lafont has always preferred to abdicate from the responsibility of active formal political life. This is an issue which is discussed in the filmed interview referred to earlier. Lafont stated that 'j'ai toujours cru à l'utopie – il faut une utopie mobilisatrice' <sup>1</sup>. He was then criticized by Julien who stated that she had followed him, but nothing concrete had been achieved. Although Lafont countered by stating that he had proposed a programme of regionalization, which Defferre had carried out (even if only in limited form), he then made a telling statement:

Chaque fois que j'étais dans une position de pouvoir, je l'ai abandonnée. Je déteste détenir un pouvoir, c'est ce qui m'a engagé aux véritables erreurs de ma vie. Quelquefois j'aurais pu aller plus loin si j'avais serré le poing et si j'avais décidé d'avoir le pouvoir.<sup>2</sup>

Julien then stated that Lafont had always been in advance of others in ideas, but that he went away when things began to materialize (Film Passuello 2001). He chose to give priority to his role as a teacher, and to work towards his political ideals in cooperation with

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<sup>1</sup> I have always believed in utopia. A utopia to stir people into action is needed.

<sup>2</sup> Each time that I was in a position of power, I abandoned it. I hate to be in a position of power. It's what has committed me to the real mistakes in my life. Sometimes I could have gone further if I had clenched my fists and had decided to have power.

the hexagonal left, and as a member, but never a leader, of the Occitan organizations Lutte Occitane, VVAP, and the Partit Occitan. Nevertheless the influence of his publications alone is sufficient to entitle him to be regarded as the leader of the Occitan movement.

Petit analyzed their impact thus:

Ces publications alimentent le débat aussi bien dans la gauche française que dans l'occitanisme après 1968. Elles auront été les outils indispensables à la prise de conscience régionale surgie dans la jeunesse méridionale et dans d'autres minorités de l'hexagone<sup>1</sup>. (Petit 1980: 333)

Even now, in his 80s, Lafont is regarded with respect, and almost reverence, by the new generation of Occitanists. Jordi Escartin, the author of a recent self help guide to the Occitan language, and committed militant, (he is bringing up his children with Occitan as their first language), refers to Lafont as his 'master and spiritual father' (Escartin interview November 2003).

### **9.3 The ambiguous role of Yves Rouquette**

The origin of Yves Rouquette's relationship with the Occitan movement, and with Robert Lafont, is described in Chapter 3.3.4. To summarize the key points, Rouquette began his involvement as a pupil of Lafont, and described himself in his early years as a 'disciple fanatisé' (Rouquette 1981:74), but by the 1970s they became increasingly estranged as Rouquette made more explicit his more nationalist interpretation of Occitanism. Jeanjean describes both as being extremely 'susceptibles' (which can be translated both as touchy and sensitive), and as having gathered about themselves their own personal court. The 'fratricidal struggle at the top', culminating in the split in the IEO in 1980, had catastrophic consequences as it led to a dispersion of forces at a time when there was a great need for unity (Jeanjean 1995: 96-97). Rouquette is the only name which emerges as a potential rival for the title of leader of the Occitan movement in the period 1974-1980. He had apparently sufficient authority to influence the policy of both VVAP and the IEO. Did he meet the requirements for effective political leadership as defined earlier? It is contended that the movement was damaged not merely by the fact of the divisive impact of his

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<sup>1</sup> These publications fuelled debate as much in the French left as within Occitanism after 1968. They were the indispensable tools for the raising of regional awareness amongst young people in the south of France, and in other minorities in France.

activity, but also by limitations to his effectiveness as a potential leader caused by certain aspects of his personality. There is ample evidence that he possesses personal charisma, in the sense of possessing the ability to impose his views on others and to dominate proceedings, and using the word 'in its vulgarized form as a synonym for prestige' (Graumann and Moscovici 1986: 8), but he lacked the skills to promote unity or to strengthen organizations which are also necessary for effective political leadership (Heywood 2002: 348).

Rouquette has been described as 'un des plus grands écrivains et activistes occitans d'aujourd'hui'<sup>1</sup> (Equipe d'animation pédagogique de l'Académie de Toulouse 1993: 83). His poetry has been described as full of fire, intense life and violent urges (Brun 1980: 43). Such a description gives a clue to both the strengths and weaknesses of his character, as it appears from the many references to his interventions on behalf of the Occitan cause. Brun's quotation of an unnamed Parisian's description of Rouquette as 'le tonitruant individu et gueulard notoire'<sup>2</sup> (Brun 1980: 42) emphasizes the negative reputation which he gained amongst some. Two sources give considerable insight into the nature of Rouquette's contribution to, and impact on, the Occitan movement. Touraine's study of the movement describes the dramatic effect of Rouquette's participation in one of the meetings for sociological intervention, and is worth quoting from at length. The most tense moment of the whole two year research project was on the occasion when the Montpellier group received Rouquette and Pierre Maclouf, on May 18, 1979. The latter was barely given a chance to express his views. For five hours militants and researchers were practically reduced to silence when, in an atmosphere described as electric, Rouquette confronted one of the militants, 'Agram'<sup>3</sup>. Touraine states that this violent clash was beyond the ability of the researchers to control the situation, with the result that gradually the other members abandoned the meeting (Touraine 1981a: 135). During the course of the session Rouquette argued that the movement should cease its focus on the problems of the wine producers, and the effects of Languedocian tourist development. He proposed instead a form of

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<sup>1</sup> One of the greatest Occitan writers and activists of the present day.

<sup>2</sup> The thundering individual, and notorious loudmouth.

<sup>3</sup> Members of the group were not identified by their real names, but the information that he was a viticulteur and leader of MIVOC identifies him as Jean Huillet. This is confirmed by the evidence from Vidal (see below).

Occitan nationalism, which though still linked to social struggles, would seek to promote Occitanism over a wider area. His style of debate is indicated by the fact that he is described as giving the meeting a battering. At the follow-up meeting the next day, in the absence of Rouquette and 'Agram', a lengthy discussion ensued. One of the participants, 'Rosa' (a teacher, member of the PCF), described their experience as a psychodrama, and said that after six years of such dramas she had had enough of seeing no real progress made, and had thus joined the Communist party. 'Garrigue' claimed that he could not understand the views of Rouquette, which formed a 'vaste système hermétique qui mêle informations objectives et mystification'<sup>1</sup>. 'Cazals', a member of VVAP, stated that Rouquette was full of internal contradictions, and was capable of convincing a gathering of one thing and then of its opposite. 'Garrigue' summed up his effect – 'il a le verbe, il séduit', claiming that he seduces by the use of language, but at the expense of the negation of the person he is speaking to. Another member of the group, a regional leader of the CFDT, said that he was glad that no members of his union had witnessed the confrontation, as it would have undone all his efforts to get them to recognize an Occitan identity (Touraine 1981a:137-138). This incident is typical of many where Rouquette by his very passion had a negative effect on some of the people he was trying to influence. Formaggio, who attended the Université Occitane d'Été in 1975 and 1976, witnessed similar heated exchanges between Rouquette and others, which had the effect of sickening many of the participants who were outside the 'inner circle' (Formaggio 1976: 210).

Another source of information on Rouquette comes from Vidal's study of MIVOC, (Vidal 2000). Vidal concentrates on the role of Jean Huillet, the leader of MIVOC, and he describes Huillet's relationship with Rouquette. Huillet was influenced by Rouquette, and for several years they were active together in the Occitanist left, although Huillet was a member of Lutte Occitane, which Rouquette considered too 'gauchiste'. The differences between them emerged fully when Huillet was invited to participate in Touraine's research programme (Vidal 2000: 92). Vidal was himself as a young man involved in the viticulteurs' struggles, and is able to give a personal appreciation of Rouquette. He emphasizes Rouquette's love of language, whether French, Occitan, patois or 'Rouquette'

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<sup>1</sup> A vast impenetrable system which mixes objective facts and mystification.

(sic), and writes that Rouquette loved verbal sparring like others love a punchup. He describes Rouquette as being appreciated in the Béziers area for the richness of his oratory, but that his 'coups de patte' (cutting remarks) were feared. Vidal's conclusion is that Rouquette was too individualistic, and not sufficiently 'politique'. This can be translated as 'political' or 'diplomatic', and both seem to be appropriate. His capacity to antagonize people was confirmed in conversation with current activists.

What then has been his contribution to the Occitan movement? His passionate commitment to the Occitan language and his literary works have played a major role in the cultural side of the movement. He himself argues that by his establishment of the co-operative record company, Ventadorn, in 1969, and of CIDO, the Centre International de Documentation Occitane at Béziers, in 1975, he achieved practical results, 'unlike Lafont who was too much a man of the Faculty who didn't get things done' (Rouquette interview September 2002). It is true that Ventadorn enabled the work of militant singers like Claude Marti to gain a wider diffusion, increasing their potential to promote the language and their political ideas. CIDO established a national Occitan médiathèque for the collection, cataloguing and conservation of all the written and audiovisual resources in Occitan, or on the subject of Occitania. He thus provided a centralized source of access for researchers, and 'an essential organ for the propagation of Occitan culture' (Jeanjean 1992: 110).

Rouquette's contribution to the overtly political side of the movement is more ambiguous. The 'internal contradictions' referred to by 'Cazals' (Touraine 1981a: 138), and inconsistencies in his attitude to Occitan nationalism described by Abrate (Abrate 2001: 537), reduced his effectiveness in raising support even for his own programme. On the other hand he was able to influence a sufficient number of people in the late 1970s to act as a divisive force within the movement, polarizing support between his and Lafont's interpretation of the way forward. Even within VVAP his position was ambiguous. His own description of his role is revealing. He stated :

J'étais un peu patron de VVAP même si je ne portais pas le titre de président.

C'était moi en effet le patron<sup>1</sup>. (Rouquette interview September 2003)

In fact Rouquette held no official position and so this attitude was not always welcome to the individuals who made up the administrative committee of VVAP, leading to resentment

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<sup>1</sup> I was to some extent the head of VVAP even if I didn't have the title of president. Actually I was the head.



of his tendency to speak as though he represented the views of VVAP (VVAP IB August 1978: 6). He admits to a distaste for the more bureaucratic aspects of political life, dealing with files etc. (Rouquette Interview September 2003), thus confirming the impression gained that he was not able to fulfill that aspect of leadership which requires one to be 'task-orientated' (Blondel 1987: 140). Lafont claimed that Rouquette spoke only for himself (Lafont Interview November 2003), and a member of the current generation of young Occitanists, who had initially regarded Rouquette as a heroic figure, but had become disillusioned on making contact with him, has described him as 'égocentrique'. Rouquette withdrew from political activity in the early 1980s, and now talks with some bitterness of those 'university intellectuals' and Marxists who he blames for the current situation which leaves him 'in despair' (Rouquette Interview September 2003). Although Rouquette's name is associated with that of Lafont in the history of Occitanism since 1960, the evidence suggests that at no point did he present the characteristics of an effective political leader of the movement.

#### **9.4 The contribution of Gustave Alirol**

During the later part of the period when Rouquette was considering himself as the head of VVAP, the actual President was Gustave Alirol. Operating in a very different fashion from either Lafont or Rouquette, he has emerged as the leader of what has remained of the Occitan political movement in the period since 1982, the point at which in Lafont's view the 'vingt glorieuses' (the twenty glorious years) of Occitanism ended and the Occitan political movement disappeared (Lafont 2003: 218). Alirol was instrumental in the creation of, and continued existence of, the Partit Occitan. Examination of Alirol's performance as President firstly of VVAP since 1978, and then of the Partit Occitan, reveals that he seems to conform to the pattern of requirements in the second stage of the evolution of an ethnoregionalist party, with Lafont having to all intents and purposes already played the role of the charismatic founding father, even though he had not founded a party as such. De Winter argues, based on the work of Harmel and Svasand, that in the second and third stages of an ethnoregionalist party 'organizational skills, strategic insight and consensus-building capacities', and then 'credibility and dependability...to convince other parties that

the ethnoregionalist party is an acceptable and reliable partner in government' are crucial (De Winter 1998: 223).

Evidence exists that Alirol has succeeded in creating a new image for the Occitanist movement. *L'Indépendent*, October 23 1989<sup>1</sup>, reporting Alirol's press conference after the party's congress at Narbonne, stated:

Ultime précision, comme les Verts, le mouvement occitaniste a réussi sa mutation. Fini le look baba cool, revanchard et soixantuitard (sic). Voici le look BCBG, qui a assuré une partie du succès des Verts, selon Gustav Alirol. Costume, cravate et attaché case, il en est l'exemple type<sup>2</sup>.

He was described by a former member of the *Partit Occitan* as having 'de la prestance, carrure...il fait bonne figure quand on va à Bruxelles'<sup>3</sup>, and as possessing the capacity to achieve a prominent position if he had chosen to make a career within a major hexagonal party. He has been described as serious, dynamic, tenacious and imaginative (VVAP IB 110 April 1985). Unlike Lafont and Rouquette, he comes from a background of practical politics, having been mayor of the small community of Saint Hostien, Haute-Loire since before the creation of the *Partit Occitan* (although he admits that when he first became President of VVAP in 1978 he had no political training – Chartier and Larvor 2004: 280). By profession he is an academic, teaching law at the University of Lyon. He made clear from the beginning of the *Partit Occitan* that it was necessary to modernize Occitan political discourse, to take into account the economic and political crisis, and the arrival of the left in power. He was anxious to get rid of a certain type of abstract discourse, or 'un discours de langue de bois', (waffle or cant), which had afflicted Occitanism in the past (P.Oc. IB August 1987: 3). A committed European, he has reshaped policy (in the face of opposition), so that by membership of the *Alliance Libre Européenne* the party has adapted to the situation of the 'new regionalism' of the late 1980s and the 1990s. This is described by Keating as being no longer 'contained within the framework of the nation state' (Keating 1998: 73) and using the existence of Europe to project the image of the region,

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in P.Oc. Internal bulletin 17 December 1989

<sup>2</sup> Like the Green Party, the Occitanist movement has been successful in its transformation. Gone is the hippy look, harking back to the events of May 1968, bent on revenge. Here is the chic conservative look, which according to Alirol has been partly responsible for the success of the Greens. He is the classic example of it, with his suit, tie and briefcase.

<sup>3</sup> He has great presence, calibre...he puts up a good show when we go to Brussels.

and to defend minority cultures and languages (Keating 1998: 163). Alirol has adapted and modernized the programme of the Occitanist political movement, and created a 'respectable' face for it. As President of RPS he has enabled Occitanism to play a prominent role alongside the major French ethnoregionalist groups.

How far has he fulfilled the requirement to create consensus (De Winter 1998: 223)? On the evidence so far obtained, he appears to have survived since 1987 without any leadership challenges, and only two explicit criticisms have been found. The first is a satirical poem (in *La Letra Occitanista*, Aude, No.3 June 1989). Addressing Alirol, the anonymous author claims that the 'admired leader' had left his troops too much alone, was never on the television or on the radio, and was a pretty rare sight on the ground. Arguing that this is the age of the cathode ray, where the only reality in washing powder or in politics is what is on the television, he urges Alirol to 'get back on the trail'. Although written in an eccentric style there seems to be a valid political point being made, in that Alirol does not seem to have possessed a charismatic ability to reach out and convert an audience much wider than the group of 'party faithful' who have formed the core of the *Partit Occitan* since its inception. The second criticism appears among a series of discussion documents published in *Partit Occitan Internal bulletin* 39 (September 1993). It has not been possible to identify the author, as although it is typed it is signed with indecipherable initials. In an extensive criticism of the party (pp. 22-26) the author claims that in his opinion the party lacks a captain (p. 23). A former member of the *Partit Occitan* has described Alirol as intelligent, level-headed and reflective, never adopting positions which leave him exposed, nor which could harm the Occitan movement. It was argued that he has managed to hold on to his position as President precisely because he has never adopted uncompromising positions, and it was suggested that his profession, law, influenced his style of leadership. Although acknowledging the positive aspects of Alirol's leadership, this assessment ended with the opinion that Alirol was not always sufficiently assertive in promoting his views.

On balance it seems that Alirol does possess a number of positive attributes in terms of leadership style, enabling him to hold together a group of supporters, and thus reducing the factionalism which was a feature of previous Occitan political organizations. He has kept a

political wing of the movement alive, and renovated its image, but has not succeeded in making headway in expanding its support base.

## 9.5 Concluding comments

In their study of the Occitan movement made in 1979-1980 Touraine's team argued that:

L'opposition de Lafont et de Rouquette, qui domine actuellement le mouvement occitan et plus particulièrement l'IEO, est bien au centre des problèmes du mouvement.<sup>1</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 281).

Abrate summarized thus the confrontation which developed between the two points of view:

Rouquette dénonce en des termes très virulents, un anti-nationalisme systématique de Lafont qui joue dans un sens pro-français, donc anti-occitan, et qui n'aboutit finalement qu'à un nationalisme français; Lafont dénonce, en des termes aussi virulents, un nationalisme idéaliste de Rouquette, qui conduit l'occitanisme à un archaïsme de fait tant sur le plan idéologico-politique que sur le plan culturel, et donc à un échec similaire qu'a connu le Félibrige.<sup>2</sup> (Abrate 2001: 535)

It was interesting to find that, when interviewed, each man initiated the topic of the other, and siezed the opportunity to express the differences between them. Some degree of rancour clearly still exists between them.

This chapter has argued that in addition to the problems created by these ideological and personal differences, the movement suffered from the fact that neither man matched the paradigm for a successful political leader, combining charismatic features and organizational talent. Alirol, although conforming more closely to the image of a successful politician in his ability to modify policy and modernize the image of his party, and showing an extraordinary degree of commitment to political Occitanism over a long period, has never combined it with the kind of single minded dynamism and multi-faceted political skills which effective leaders of ethnoregionalist movements such as Pujol and

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<sup>1</sup> The opposition of Lafont and Rouquette, who currently dominate the Occitan movement, and more particularly the IEO, is right at the centre of the movement's problems.

<sup>2</sup> Rouquette denounced in very virulent terms a systematic anti-nationalism on the part of Lafont, which moves in a pro-French and thus anti-Occitan direction. Lafont denounced in equally virulent terms an idealistic nationalism on the part of Rouquette, which was leading Occitanism to a de facto archaism as much in the sphere of ideology and politics as in the cultural sphere, and thus towards a failure such as the Félibrige had experienced.

Bossi have shown. It is concluded that the failure to find appropriate leader figures has been a contributory cause of the lack of success of the Occitan movement in mobilizing the Occitan population during the period since 1974. The following chapter examines and evaluates the types of mobilization strategies employed, and looks more closely at the reasons for resistance by some sectors of Occitan society.

## **Chapter 10 Problems of mobilization of the population of Occitania**

### **10.1 Introduction**

Part two of this thesis has indicated the limited levels of support available to the Occitan political movement in the form of membership numbers of organizations, level of electoral support, and acceptance of some of the ideas of the movement by sectors of society, such as the viticulteurs, or members of parties of the left. Chapter seven has analyzed some of the geographical and demographic factors which have militated against effective mobilization of the Occitan population in support of Occitan political claims, whilst Chapter eight has noted the existence of alternative political outlets for protest voters within Occitania. The purpose of this chapter is, firstly, to examine in greater depth problems specific to the mobilization of certain sectors of the population; workers, and their representatives, the trade unions; women (an issue which is not considered elsewhere, and which was considered a specific problem by the Occitanist organizations); and the young. Secondly, an examination is made of the methods of mobilization employed, with the aim of highlighting some of their limitations in terms of effectiveness.

### **10.2 The response of industrial workers and the Trade Unions**

The Occitan political organizations have not been able to make any real impact on industrial workers, although ‘le discours que pouvait tenir le mouvement Occitan a pu être significatif pour des mouvements syndicaux à des moments et sur des points précis’<sup>1</sup> (unattributed quotation in Jeanjean 1992: 108). One example is the involvement of Occitanists in support of the striking miners of Adrecht, near Alès in 1980 and 1981, which remains for Lafont one of the most significant points of his career. He recalls speaking in Occitan, below Occitan banners, before thousands of demonstrators in Montpellier, and states that his involvement was on the initiative of the miners (Lafont interview November

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<sup>1</sup> Although the discourse proposed by the Occitan movement was able to be significant for the unions at specific times, and limited to precise points.

4 2003). Jeanjean concludes that these 'collaborations épisodiques'<sup>1</sup> did not survive the arrival of the left in power in 1981 (Jeanjean 1992:98). Martel states that during the 1970s the membership of Lutte Occitane and VVAP contained few industrial workers, as the latter tended to join hexagonal political organizations and unions, which in their experience were more capable of representing their interests (Martel 1989: 14). He points out that when miners, like viticulteurs, did march beneath an Occitan flag, they were more likely to be defending their own jobs rather than a territory (Martel 1989: 15). This point was made clear by Touraine.

Les ouvriers des mines et des entreprises qui ferment accusent plus naturellement la concentration capitaliste ou la politique d' aménagement du territoire qu'ils n'évoquent le déclin de l'Occitanie. Ils pensent en termes d'emploi et de salaires plus que de territoire et de culture, ce qui explique leur faible participation au mouvement Occitan.<sup>2</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 86)

Although it is true that some therefore sought action via traditional union means, it has also been suggested however that certain aspects of the Occitan industrial situation in the 1960s and 1970s created a generally non-militant work force. The unusually dispersed nature and small size of factories throughout the area (for example, the textile industry in the Cévennes), in comparison with the industrialized areas of northern France, created an isolated work force. Le Bris suggests that high levels of unemployment in the 1970s, particularly in Languedoc, meant that the militant who drew attention to himself because of his membership of a union or of a regionalist group might find himself the first to be dismissed when redundancies occurred, and in the circumstances many workers preferred to maintain a low profile (Le Bris 1974: 32). Since the period of his assessment, the economic situation of Occitania has changed (see Chapter 7.4), with the growth of major international and national companies in the urban areas of Occitania, and the likelihood of workers seeking a response to industrial disputes in the context of Occitanist claims, even if they were made aware of them, seems even less probable.

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<sup>1</sup> Occasional collaborations.

<sup>2</sup> It is more natural for the workers of the mines and firms which close down to blame capitalist concentration or the policy of urban and regional development, rather than the decline of Occitania. They think in terms of employment and wages rather than territory and culture, which explains their weak level of participation in the Occitan movement.

The general pattern described above is not one which is specific to Occitan ethnoregionalism. Keating has noted that ‘radical left peripheral nationalism and separatism have tended to have little appeal to the industrial working class’ (Keating 1992:73). Its members turn to the traditional parties of the left and the trade unions to defend their interests, whilst the unions have tended to attempt to protect ‘vulnerable economic sectors’ within the existing regional framework, rather than by advocating political autonomy (Keating 1992: 75). The attitude of the French unions towards Occitanism was influenced by their relationship with the major French political parties, and the latter’s attitude to Occitanism at any given time. In general the CFDT, which was ‘known for its sympathy with the Socialist party from the 1970s’ (Keeler and Hall 2001: 54) was most sympathetic towards the Occitanists. Formaggio noted that the CFDT seemed to have adhered to the slogan ‘volem viure al país’, as it claimed at the 37<sup>th</sup> regional congress of CFDT- Languedoc-Roussillon that there could be no real transformation of French society without a recognition of differences and regional identities. He also drew attention to the presence of CFDT members at Occitan Summer Universities, (consciousness raising and educational forums), and in support of demonstrations at Larzac, Griffet, Montségur and Béziers (Formaggio 1976: 451-452). However Touraine’s conclusion was that, as in Keating’s general conclusion, ‘les objectifs...de la CFDT sont plus syndicalistes et plus autogestionnaires que proprement occitans’<sup>1</sup>(Touraine 1981a: 182).

The CGT, which during the 1970s was closely linked to the Communist party (Keeler and Hall 2001: 54) was generally concerned with ‘la logique des luttes de classes industrielles’<sup>2</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 227). Formaggio cites examples of hostility by the CGT towards Occitanist causes. During the Larzac crisis the Millau section of the CGT burned 500 tracts of the Larzac Action committee because they thought it pernicious to spread a tract linking Larzac and internal colonialism themes. In 1976 the CGT followed the PCF line and would not participate in a fête organized by the CFDT and MIVOC, and at which Lutte Occitane had a stand, in support of workers during the Griffet industrial conflict (Formaggio 1976: 443). The CGT did however display some sympathy with the Occitanists in 1977, during

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<sup>1</sup> The aims of the CFDT are more unionist and autogestionnaire than really Occitan.

<sup>2</sup> An emphasis on industrial class struggles.



the period of the links between the PCF and Lafont and Maffre-Baugé (Touraine 1981a: 209).

Although isolated examples exist, in general one can conclude that the industrial working class and the unions have provided very limited support for the Occitanist cause, and that this conforms to a pattern identified elsewhere in relation to other ethnoregionalist movements. One exception to this pattern of limited working class support is the case of Corsica. De Winter's analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of ethnoregionalist voters as compared with voters in general, in a number of Western European countries, concluded that only in the current Corsican situation was the working class over-represented in support for ethnoregionalist parties (De Winter 1998: 232 and 234)<sup>1</sup>. Explanations for this anomaly are linked to the specific socio-cultural and economic situation of Corsica, including the involvement of a young, urban, economically deprived population (Dupoirier 2001: 11) and a build up of support among the workers who were attracted to parties 'exprimant la protestation sociale des petits contre les gros'<sup>2</sup>. Statistics are not available to define sociologically the voters for Occitan political groups, but evidence on the social class of the activists confirms a middle class bias, with writers and teachers forming the core of support (see Chapter 4.2.4). Lafont has noted that they have not, however, been able to extend their views on autonomy widely within the middle classes, unlike the situation in Catalonia, where autonomist ideas had advanced via the middle classes since the end of the nineteenth century (Lafont 1991: 108). Martel has suggested that the root of the problem for political Occitanism, maintained by a few intellectuals, and followed by a handful of militants, is that it does not know to which social base to attach itself (Martel 1989:14). It appears that it has attempted to mobilize support in both lower and middle class sections of society, and failed in both.

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<sup>1</sup> Dupoirier confirmed the decline of middle class support for such parties, and its reorientation amongst the working class during the 1990s (Dupoirier 2001: 12).

<sup>2</sup> Expressing the social protest of the small against the large.

### 10.3 Women and the Occitan movement

In an internal bulletin VVAP noted ‘une très faible participation des femmes dans les différentes structures du mouvement’<sup>1</sup> (VVAP 113 May-June 1982: 6). This sentiment is expressed elsewhere in internal bulletins of the Occitan political organizations. It is worth examining the explanation for this situation. Although there tends to be a smaller proportion of women than men actively participating in many political movements, there are aspects of the sociological situation within Occitania, or more precisely within rural Occitania, which have reinforced this trend. Firstly it is suggested that, certainly until recently, an inherent male chauvinism existed in Occitan society, which discouraged a decision making role by women. Secondly, there is evidence of resistance by women to Occitanist ideas (particularly the promotion of the language) seeing them as a barrier to personal emancipation and to social mobility for their families.

Some of the women who formed part of Touraine’s study sample spoke of ‘la domination de l’homme sur la femme dans la civilisation occitane’<sup>2</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 168). They stated that they were made to feel inferior in ‘la civilisation du pastis, du rugby et du taureau’, (a reference to the macho aspects of male socializing in southern France, drinking, rugby and enthusiasm for bullfighting), and that it was difficult to get women’s demands inserted into the programme of VVAP (Touraine 1981a: 168). The women noted particularly the reactionary aspects of Occitan village society, where the position of women was to be ‘dominée et soumise’<sup>3</sup> (‘Rosa’ in Touraine 1981a:184). A journalist reviewing *Caminarem*, the novel by Chabrol and Marti based on the 1975-1976 viticulteurs’ revolt, observed the very masculine standpoint of the book, and asked ‘pourquoi faut-il que la parole occitane soit constamment machiste?’<sup>4</sup> He cites Rouquette and Fabre-Colbert as examples of prominent Occitanists who adopted a chauvinistic attitude (*Cahiers Occitanie Rouge* July-August 1987: 25). The feminist interpretation of Occitan society hinted at in Touraine’s study is confirmed by a group of women working within the *Teatre de la Carriera* in the late 1970s. They produced, cooperatively, a book which includes the texts

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<sup>1</sup> A very low level of participation in the movement by women.

<sup>2</sup> The domination of men over women in the Occitan civilisation.

<sup>3</sup> Dominated and submissive.

<sup>4</sup> Why must the occitan manner of expression constantly be chauvinistic?

of a series of feminist Occitan plays, transcripts of interviews which provided the raw material for the plays, plus commentaries on the issues raised (Lo Teatre de la Carriera 1981). Although this tends to focus on rural rather than urban society, a fact which perhaps distorts the perspective, it gives considerable insight into the reasons why many women were anxious to abandon any ties with a recognizably Occitan form of society, and also reveals the difficulties experienced by those women who considered themselves to be both feminist and Occitanist. They reinforce the views on the restrictive nature of rural society for women, referred to by Touraine's subjects, and explain the paradox which they faced as feminist Occitanists, recognizing that the contemporary reality for Occitan women consisted of 'une libération par désoccitanisation et déracinement'<sup>1</sup> (Lo Teatre de la Carriera 1981:167). One passage expresses the problem as they perceived it:

Pour être reconnu socialement et avoir le maximum de chance de réussir dans la vie, on nous a appris à oublier notre culture, notre patois et même notre accent; on nous a convaincu d'être plus français que les Français. Ce bourrage de crâne a particulièrement eu un écho auprès des femmes qui n'avaient à court terme rien à perdre d'une civilisation occitane patriarcale et misogyne, qui les avait toujours réduites au silence. Devenir française était (surtout depuis 1945) un atout inespéré de promotion sociale et, par voie de conséquence, d'indépendance<sup>2</sup>. (Lo Teatre de la Carriera 1981: 167)

The authors claim that (at the time of writing) Occitan women were in a less favourable position than Breton women, who they felt had greater equality with men in the rural environment (Lo Teatre de la Carriera 1981: 169). They state however that though Occitan women have been kept out of the public sphere by men, they have greater autonomy in the sphere of running a family than do Corsican women, who are limited by aspects of the clan system (Lo Teatre de la Carriera 1981: 170). It is recognized that this work is a polemic, but a number of the authors' assertions are corroborated in more academic works. In his analysis of the 1991 survey of the use of Occitan in Languedoc (see Chapter 5.2) Hammel noted the way in which men used the language as an aspect of their socialization and a mark of belonging to a group (Hammel 1994: 64). Women, on the other hand tended to be

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<sup>1</sup> Liberation by uprooting themselves and abandoning all things Occitan

<sup>2</sup> In order to be recognized socially and to have the best chance to succeed in life, we have been taught to forget our culture, our dialect, and even our accent; we have been persuaded to be more French than the French. This brain washing has found a particularly receptive audience among women who in the short term have nothing to lose, in abandoning a patriarchal and misogynistic Occitan civilisation which has always reduced them to silence. Becoming 'French' was (especially since 1945), a real asset on the way to social advancement, and as a result, to independence.

keen to promote French rather than Occitan as the language of the family, in order to give their children the best chance of succeeding in life (Hammel 1994: 65).

The issue of the lack of involvement of women in Occitanism is discussed with respect to one particular area in Vidal's study of MIVOC. He comments on the absence of women in the photographs of demonstrations, reports of meetings, and the very few references in other written sources (Vidal 2000: 39). He states that the few who were present at meetings which he attended were usually wives of viticulteurs, or sometimes 'néo-ruraux', newcomers, outsiders who had taken up the rural life. He suggests a slightly different interpretation for the absence of women, pointing out that many of the wives of MIVOC members were not involved with the vines, but worked as, for example, primary school teachers or secretaries in nearby towns, and by providing an assured income made possible the activism of some of the MIVOC militants (Vidal 2000: 43). Though this is a limited and specific example, the general impression, however, gained from Vidal's study is a confirmation of the lack of interest in Occitanist ideology on the part of women.

This is to some extent confirmed from the findings in Lem's anthropological study of a wine producing village near Béziers in the 1980s. She argued that in the earlier part of the twentieth century women in rural Languedoc, closely associated with the menfolk in the tending of the vines, took an active part in political protest (Lem 1999: 138-139). She found that the situation changed as machinery took over many of the tasks formerly performed by women, and women were either constrained into a more domestic environment, or engaged in multiple small jobs to supplement the family income. Lem concluded that 'women's modes of political expression have become more and more attenuated' (Lem 1999: 140). She also confirmed some of the views expressed by the women of Lo Teatre de la Carriera, observing a patriarchal society dominated by husbands and fathers (Lem 1999: 162).

This failure to involve women to any great degree in Occitan activism is reflected in the fact that there are few notable females associated with the Occitan political movement. The career of Marie Rouanet (Maria Roanet in Occitan) is thus interesting, as it illustrates the way in which a woman who was an extremely militant Occitanist in the early 1970s chose

ultimately to work for her ideals in an independent manner, within the hexagonal political system, and outside the Occitanist political organizations<sup>1</sup>. She has been married since 1961 to Yves Rouquette, but has always maintained a separate identity. Between 1971 and 1975 she was one of the Occitan militant singers (see section 10.5.3 below) and also published in Occitan, her novels reflecting her political engagement. In 1976, at a time when Rouquette was developing his increasingly nationalistic view of Occitania, Rouanet took a different path, standing as an independent on a list of the left in the municipal elections in Béziers. She remained as a town councillor until 2000, with responsibility for 'heritage' matters. She has published extensively, but in French, autobiographical and fictional works which reflect the culture, traditions and natural environment of Occitania, but which no longer advocate political change. There is one reference to her early career in the final chapter of 'Du côté des hommes', when, in an address to her husband, she refers to 'des causes belles et perdues que nous avons défendues ensemble'<sup>2</sup>(Rouanet 2001: 226).

No survey exists of the attitudes of women towards political Occitanism during the period covered by the current study. It is contended here, however, that sufficient documentary evidence exists, as presented above, to make the assumption that it failed to offer a valid and worthwhile option to the majority of women, for complex reasons linked to sociological specificities of parts of the Occitan territory, in addition to the factors which made it unacceptable to much of the male population.

#### **10.4 Young people**

The problem of the rejuvenation of the political wing of the Occitan movement has already been indicated in Chapter 4.3.5, where it was pointed out that in recent years the Partit Occitan has tended to be dominated by a small group of now ageing militants. These began their involvement during the 1970s, when there was initially a great deal of enthusiasm for the Occitanist proposals. In the second internal bulletin of VVAP Maclouf wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Information based on Qui est Marie Rouanet? [www.ac.montpellier](http://www.ac.montpellier) and Rouanet 1971, 1983, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Fine causes which we championed together, and lost.

Ce n'est pas par hasard si c'est la jeunesse, couche la moins soumise aux contraintes idéologiques du passé, qui est aussi celle où la revendication occitane rencontre le plus d'écho'<sup>1</sup> (VVAP IB 2 September 1974: 4)

Quéré noted that in both the Breton and Occitan regionalist movements the main support came from young intellectuals, and to a much lesser degree from young workers (Quéré 1978: 362). He attributed this support to a number of factors; the need for roots; an expression of libertarian aspirations (Quéré 1978: 362); and more specifically, 'un moyen d'expression de la révolte contre le système scolaire et à travers lui contre tout système d'autorité'<sup>2</sup>, closely linked to the atmosphere of post 1968 France (Quéré 1978: 364). The enthusiasm of the large numbers of young people, mainly students, who participated in the early stages of the Larzac campaign reflected this iconoclastic atmosphere. Annie Zerby describes her involvement there in 1974 as 'une aventure', which played a significant role in her early life (Zerby, A. interview November 2003).

This level of enthusiasm among the young was not maintained. Members of VVAP attempted to analyze the reasons. They attributed it partly to a general political malaise and disillusionment which left young people 'rebelles à tout discours politique classique'<sup>3</sup> (VVAP IB 4 –new numbering November–December 1983: 3). They pointed out that contemporary young people did not know about 1968, and found no answers to their concerns in the social model of 1984 (VVAP IB 101- new numbering again January – February 1984: 4). It was stressed that it was necessary to renew and adapt Occitan political discourse in order to make it more accessible to the young of Occitania, and in 1984 Guerrero of the Bureau National of VVAP made proposals to inspire an Occitan youth movement (VVAP IB 107 November-December 1984). He argued that the general public had no clear perception of the Occitan movement, and were unable to distinguish between VVAP and the IEO. He stated that in the public mind the Occitanists were often associated with 'folk' (in the sense of a rather passéist and unsophisticated attitude to life, as well as in the musical sense) with the result that for young people they appeared anachronistic, outdated and rural. Guerrero proposed the setting up of a Commission for youth, which

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<sup>1</sup> It is not by chance that it is among young people, the sector the least subjected to the ideological constraints of the past, that Occitan claims have had the most influence.

<sup>2</sup> A way of expressing their revolt against the educational system, and through that, against all types of authority.

<sup>3</sup> Unamenable to all normal political discourse

could contact young people's musical and cultural organizations to promote Occitanist ideas. The proposals were never implemented, and although the Partit Occitan made some attempts with Escartin to encourage young people to become involved, any revival, in the 1990s, came in a more extreme, if small-scale, form with the establishment of CROC, in the university milieu (see Chapter 4.4.5). In addition MEDOC, a movement of Occitan students, in the late 1990s established branches at the universities of Montpellier, Pau, Bordeaux and Toulouse. It focuses more on the cultural than the political aspects of Occitanism. A journalist of *La Setmana*, in an article about MEDOC, stated that though this student movement was born from the Occitanism of the twentieth century, the young people did not want to argue the issues which had motivated the Occitanism of the 1970s, as the situation had changed. He argued that though the students describe themselves as apolitical, it did not mean that they were not concerned about the problems of society, but reflects their negative image of politicians and the political environment (*La Setmana* 234 15 December 1999: 8). In 2001 the director Michel Gayraud made a documentary film about Occitan youth. In it he argued that there are significant differences between contemporary young Occitans and those of thirty years earlier. It was stated that a positive difference is that they do not have the 'sectarian' approach which contributed to the factionalism of the 1970s, but that this is because most of them are involved in learning the language and reviving the music simply because they enjoy it, and that apart from the members of CROC, there is little theorizing (Michel Gayraud in *La Setmana* 343 6 February 2002: 4). On the evidence of the film itself, (Jovent, shown on FR3 February 3 2002), the majority of the young people involved had no real desire to change the nature of French society, and, as Gayraud points out, even 'los joves que s'interèssan a la lenga e a la cultura occitanas demòran una minoritat'<sup>1</sup> (*La Setmana* 343 6 February 2002: 4). The conclusion is clear, those who have a political conception of Occitanism form an even smaller group, and the prospect of a revival to replace the current ageing generation of those who are politically motivated looks unlikely.

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<sup>1</sup> The young people who are interested in Occitan language and culture remain a minority.

## **10.5. An examination of the methods of mobilization available to, and used by, the Occitan political movement.**

### **10.5.1 Introduction**

Earlier chapters have examined some of the factors which have contributed to the failure of the Occitan political movement to mobilize a high level of support to its cause. The following section examines more closely some of the limitations of the methods of mobilization used by, or available to, the movement in the period 1974 – 2000. As has already been pointed out (Chapter seven) there is no commonly shared sense of identity among the population of Occitania. Klandermans stresses that a range of measures is required to create a sense of collective identity or consensus by effective consciousness raising. The variety of options available is extensive, and may include public speeches, slogans, banners, posters, street theatre, marches and demonstrations, pamphlets, door to door canvassing, and the use of the media, radio, television, the public press and that of the militant organization (Klandermans 1988: 184). In the case of the Occitan political movement, the use to any great extent of many of those options tends to have been limited to the early period of Occitan politicization, 1968 -1976, in association with social movement activity (see Chapter six). It will be explained that they were not then replaced by effective methods of mobilization adapted to the changed political situation.

### **10.5.2 The role of the media**

As Tarrow states, ‘the media provide a diffuse source for consensus formation that movements on their own cannot easily achieve’ (Tarrow 1998: 116). He goes on to point out that the advantages of coverage by sympathetic journalists, where this may exist, are often negated by the desire to frame a story in a way which will sell newspapers or attract viewers, which frequently means a preference for dramatic, visible events. The decision by the Occitanist groups not to use violence (see section 10.6) meant that they did not get the same amount of coverage as, for example, the Corsicans or the Basques. Della Porta and Diani stress that ‘control of the media becomes ...an essential premise for any attempt at political mobilization’ (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 40), and though the Occitanists were not so ambitious as to envisage control of the media, they had hoped for their campaign to be at least ‘supported by access to means of mass communication’ (Della Porta and Diani



1999: 40). This was not the case, for two reasons. Firstly, the concentration of ownership of the published press, and the level of state influence over the broadcasting media in France, limited access for the promotion of policies which were perceived as dangerous or deviant (Harrison 1990). This situation applied to all the ethnoregionalist groups in France. Secondly, it appears that the attitude of the mass media to Occitanism was particularly negative. Formaggio stated:

Au niveau des mass-média, l'image de l'occitanisme n'est guère brillante. En dépit de quelques témoignages de sympathie, la plupart des articles parus dans les quotidiens régionaux ou nationaux témoignent parfois, sinon d'une certaine hostilité, tout au moins d'un scepticisme important'<sup>1</sup> (Formaggio 1976: 432).

This attitude continued, with certain newspapers considered by the Occitanists to be particularly hostile to their cause. Formaggio noted that though *Le Monde* sometimes opened its 'Tribune Libre' column to Robert Lafont, one of its journalists, Viansson Ponte, was overtly hostile to the Occitanists, holding them up to ridicule (Formaggio 1976: 437). The Occitanists continued to find *Le Monde* guilty of 'obstruction systématique...à l'encontre de notre mouvement'<sup>2</sup>, and objected to the editor's failure to publish successive press releases, in spite of giving newspaper space to statements by Le Pen (VVAP IB 108 November-December 1984: 12). Alain Roch, a member of the committee of the IEO, argued that when the Parisian press did occasionally publish any articles about Occitania, they presented 'des images d'Epinal' (idealized and unsophisticated images), or caricatural stereotypes based on troubadours, Cathars, the sun, pétanque, rugby etc., rather than addressing the serious questions which the Occitanists put forward (Roch 1997: 162 and 166).

The regional press has not been much more sympathetic. The political Occitanists have consistently found the regional paper *Midi Libre* negative in its attitude. Touraine states that militants from the Montpellier research group invited a journalist from *Midi Libre*, 'journal accusé d'être l'expression d'un conservatisme notabiliaire hostile au mouvement

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<sup>1</sup> At the level of the mass media Occitanism hardly has a satisfactory image. In spite of a few sympathetic accounts, the majority of the articles which have appeared in the regional or national daily papers show if not a certain degree of hostility, at the very least considerable scepticism.

<sup>2</sup> Systematic obstruction against our movement.

occitan'<sup>1</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 71). Midi Libre was accused of exploiting its monopoly in Languedoc, and of 'sterilizing' accounts of political and social events so that they were acceptable to the notables and to the government (Cahiers Occitanie Rouge 2 1976: 33). The kind of scoffing tone adopted towards the Occitanists is illustrated by an article about the Partit Occitan by J Vilaceque.

Pour tout dire, ils sont très gentils. Très gentils mais attendrissants. Comme tombés d'une autre planète. Ils se saluent en lenguo nostro, ornent leurs boîte à lettres de prénoms occitanistes, ils hésitent entre la bonne vieille dialectique soixante-huitarde et la nostalgie, qui, chez eux, est toujours ce qu'elle était.<sup>2</sup> (Midi Libre 31 March 1988: 13)

Although some regional papers have a weekly column in Occitan, they tend not to discuss Occitan current affairs (Roch 1997: 163). The Partit Occitan criticized the editor of Sud-Ouest Dordogne, who discontinued the Occitan column because the author had introduced a political element, by criticizing the building of the Clermont-Bordeaux motorway (P.Oc. IB 24 July-August 1990: 5). The situation is very different from that in Catalonia, where the local press is very dynamic, and almost exclusively in Catalan, thus contributing to the reinforcement of the Catalan identity (Becat and Sirille 2003: 87).

Although it is not an exact analogy, given the complexity of the Lega's relations with other political parties and with Italian industrialists, a study of the effects on the Lega Lombarda of media framing by the Italian press provides an interesting viewpoint on this aspect of an ethnoregionalist's groups concerns. It has been argued by Ruzza and Schmidtke, in their study of the impact of the media on the Lega Lombarda in Italy, that negative media framing need not inevitably have a harmful effect on an ethnoregionalist group. In the case of the Lega Lombarda, the press opposition, like that of the journalists of *Le Monde* and *Midi Libre* towards the Occitanists, was often conducted with the 'weapon of irony and sarcasm' (Ruzza and Schmidtke 1993: 7). The authors argue that the extent of this hostility meant that the visibility of the Lega Lombarda was increased with the help of the media. In addition, though, there was a convergence of themes expressed by both the Lega Lombarda and the press, with respect to criticism of corruption and inefficiency within a number of

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<sup>1</sup> A newspaper accused of representing the conservative viewpoint of the regional notables, which was hostile to the Occitan movement.

<sup>2</sup> Actually, they are very nice. Very nice, but touching. As though they are from another planet. They greet each other in 'our language', decorate their letter boxes with Occitanist first names, waver between the good old dialectic of the 1968 period and nostalgia, which, for them, is always what it used to be.

Italian political parties (Ruzza and Schmidtke 1993: 4). The authors state that even though the press was criticizing the Lega for 'racist and irresponsible attitudes', the objective convergence between a number of concerns expressed by the media and the Lega's programme acted as a reinforcement of the latter, and contributed to a higher level of electoral support for them (Ruzza and Schmidtke 1993: 8). Although it is possible to take the view that all publicity is good publicity, it seems that negative publicity without at least some convergence of ideas on the part of the media (which was not the case for the Occitanists and the French media) must have reduced the potential for the mobilization of the population in support of Occitanist ideas.

Klandermans has pointed out that one strategy available to circumvent the mass media where it is hostile is the use of a political organization's own newspapers and magazines. He notes the limitations of this strategy, pointing out that the militant press tends to be effective only in communicating to the active core of the organization, that evidence suggests that even they do not always read it, even if they subscribe, and that it is not an effective means of mobilizing a wider audience (Klandermans 1988: 189). The Occitan political movement has had difficulty in financing and maintaining militant publications. A number of ephemeral ones, such as *Revolum*, emerged during the period of greatest activism between 1968 and 1976, but over the long term it proved difficult to finance them, and to provide the expertise to produce a professional end-product. They are largely dependent on subscriptions, and as they usually have only a few hundred subscribers, there is very little revenue attracted from advertisers. The greater the proportion of the revue written in Occitan, the more the potential audience is restricted (Roch 1997: 164). Of the 89 revues relating to Occitania catalogued by CIRDOC in 2002 only five are listed as political in content, the majority dealing with cultural or linguistic subjects (*Revistas d'Oc* CIRDOC 2002). Occitania-VVAP, which was the journal of VVAP and then of the *Partit Occitan* has had a continuous existence since 1978, although it has been under threat periodically due to financial, technical and personnel problems. At one point it was argued that because of its unprofessional appearance it embarrassed the militants who were supposed to sell it (*P.Oc. IB* 16 October 1989: 12). Although it is now a more professional publication, as it is still sold by subscription it is largely 'preaching to the converted' rather than acting as a mobilizing force to extend support for its political programme. It can be

concluded that the press, whether national, regional or militant, has played little role in the dissemination of Occitan political ideas.

One aspect of the association between the political and cultural wings of the Occitan movement has been their campaigns to gain greater access to the broadcasting media. The local sections of Radio France transmit only occasional brief slots in Occitan, although some 'associative' or community independent stations transmit more since the comparative liberalizing of the media after 1981, and Radio Païs transmits almost entirely in Gascon in Béarn. France 3 is the state regional television channel, and although certain of its stations transmit a small amount in Occitan (35 hours per year in PACA, and 20 hours per year in Languedoc and Midi-Pyrénées), there is nothing in Aquitaine, and only a few minutes per week in Limousin and Auvergne (Sibille 2003: 186). Access to the television has been considered by many as a key to a political as well as a cultural renaissance. When the Partit Occitan, the PNO, and a number of cultural organizations campaigned to persuade the regional manager of FR3 Aquitaine to transmit some programmes in Occitan, they also put forward proposals for 'une véritable télévision régionale publique pour l'ensemble des pays d'Oc, à l'image de ce qu'ont fait les Espagnols en Catalogne et en Euskadi, les Britanniques au Pays de Galles, ou de ce qui existe dans les états multinationaux qui reconnaissent leur propre diversité, comme par exemple la Suisse'<sup>1</sup> (P.Oc. IB 23 June 1990: 10). Miquela Bramerie, who for thirteen years produced the Occitan programme 'Vaqui' for FR3 Marseilles, claimed that the Catalan channel had increased the number of Catalan speakers from 40% of the population to 90% over a five year period (Bramerie 1997: 176). She also suggested that, on a lesser scale, the presence of regional languages on news programmes in Corsica and Alsace had had a positive effect (Bramerie 1997: 178). The greater use of the Occitan language in television programmes might indeed encourage the promotion of the language, and would presumably give greater prominence to issues of interest to the Occitan population. As such it could contribute to the encouragement of a greater sense of identity in the region. There can be no assumption however that this would directly contribute to the political aims of the Occitanists, other than those linked to the

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<sup>1</sup> A proper public regional television channel for the whole of the Occitan territory, like the Spanish have created in Catalonia and the Pays Basque, the British in Wales, and which exists in multinational states which recognize their own diversity, like for example Switzerland.

protection and restoration of the language. Doubts also exist as to how popular such a channel would be. Hammel and Gardy discovered that only 22% of the sample questioned as part of the 1991 survey into the use of Occitan in Languedoc (see Chapter 5.2) claimed to listen to the existing radio programmes in Occitan, and only 10% to watch the television programmes with any degree of regularity (Hammel and Gardy 1994: 132). They concede that the awkward timings and limited subject matter of the brief programmes might contribute to this lack of interest, but that an extension of the range and times of programmes would not necessarily incite greater interest (Hammel and Gardy 1994: 133). For such a measure to be effective, it would need to be part of the kind of broader package of measures such as those which accompanied in the 1980s and 1990s the setting up of the Welsh language channel S4C in 1982, (for example within the education system Welsh language classes in English medium schools, widespread use of bilingual road and shop signs, administrative forms and official publications); measures which validated the language, creating a 'modern and urban Welsh language media and communication subculture' (Christiansen 1998: 128).

### **10.5.3 Posters, graffiti, theatre, music**

Some reference must be made to some of the methods of consciousness raising used by the Occitanists. It is significant that the widest range of measures was employed in the earlier stages of the politicization of Occitanism, in the period between 1968 and 1976, when (as explained in Chapter six), it was associated with social movement activity. The methods used included the use of posters and the spread of graffiti with a political and/or cultural theme, and the use of street theatre and music as a form of 'agit-prop'. The role played by such measures in the dissemination of Occitanist ideas is examined, and it is pointed out that as the use of such methods declined, they were not replaced by alternative methods of mobilizing the population.

The widest use of posters was in the period prior to 1974, and they tended to be most widespread in Languedoc, where they often expressed criticism of the tourist development in that region, which was perceived as an aspect of internal colonialism. The graffiti, often

just the Occitan cross, and the words ‘Occitanie libre’<sup>1</sup>, or simply ‘Oc’, appeared widespread, on telegraph poles, walls and road signs, but it has been pointed out that they did not necessarily represent the expression of a great deal of militant support, as they could be the work of a handful of militants of the PNO, carried out in a night, but remaining visible for years. Although they had the effect of drawing attention to the existence of the Occitan issue, it is unlikely that they had a major positive effect in mobilizing new support for Occitan political ideas.

A more effective approach was the use of street theatre. Although this continued to some extent throughout the 1970s, it was most significant in the period 1970-1976, when Claude Alranq and the Teatre de la Carriera presented plays in a mixture of Occitan and French, the plots of which addressed the problems of Occitania, largely representing the internal colonialist thesis (see Chapter 6.5). Quéré argued that the Teatre de la Carriera played a decisive role in defining the new orientations of the Occitan movement by focussing its attention on the problems of viticulture, and after 1972, as the economic situation deteriorated, by making it less intellectual and more populist in its approach (Quéré 1978: 264). Although the plays made an impact in the villages where they were performed, they were not critically well received by all. Vidal has described members of the company as being ‘dans la tendance maoïste qui veut absolument se mettre au service du peuple’<sup>2</sup> (Vidal 2000: 21), and the plots have a didactic, and rather unsubtle, use of metaphor. The negative response to them is represented in a review by a journalist from *L’Indépendant*, a regional newspaper, quoted by Le Bris:

Ce que nous n’avons pas goûté, c’est la bassesse du style, c’est la sottise de la forme qui nous ramène à ce qu’il y a de plus stupide dans l’histoire de l’art réaliste socialiste’<sup>3</sup>.  
(Le Bris 1974: 242)

The aim of the Teatre de la Carriera had been to create eventually a professional Occitan theatre, but financial difficulties meant that its influence declined (Martel 1989: 15). As described in section 10.4, it continued to produce plays during the later 1970s, and also innovated a system whereby actors and actresses performed monologues, and sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> Free Occitania

<sup>2</sup> Belonging to those with Maoist leanings, who are determined to put themselves at the service of the people.

<sup>3</sup> What we did not enjoy, is the lowness of the style, it’s the stupidity of the form, which takes us back to everything which is most stupid in the history of socialist realism.

went into urban working class areas to perform in front of small groups in apartments, followed by a discussion (Sibé 1988: 121). Martel describes its gradual decline as being a result of 'la crise de la fin de l'après soixante-huit'<sup>1</sup> (Martel 1989: 15), and it seems true, looking at the evidence of the texts of the plays, that they represent a specific era in France's cultural history.

During the same period of the Teatre de la Carriera's greatest influence, music also played a role in the mobilization process for the Occitanists. Keating claimed that 'in contrast to Brittany there has been no Occitan youth culture or rock music' (Keating 1986: 300), subsequently modified to 'little by way of...' (Keating 1988: 207). Although not cited, this statement is possibly based on the statement of Guerrera in his analysis of the situation with regard to young people and the Occitan movement:

Qu'il n'existe pas de rock occitan (alors qu'il est une réalité très forte en Catalogne et au Pays Basque) est significatif.<sup>2</sup> (VVAP IB 107 November -December 1984: page 2 of inserted text)

Guerrera was writing at a time when it was true that music was playing no part in the mobilization of the population, but the issue of music deserves closer examination, as between 1968 and about 1976 it was important, and it again played a role, even if minor and different, during the 1990s. Jeanjean describes song as the 'fer de lance du militantisme'<sup>3</sup> of the 1970s (Jeanjean 1995: 103). Annie Zerby, in charge of the music collection at CIRDOC, has written that the new Occitan song after 1968 was 'le support d'une revendication entre culturel et politique, défendant une langue occultée, voire interdite, et dénonçant des problèmes économiques qui s'étendent sur les régions de langue occitane'<sup>4</sup> (Zerby-Cros 2002: 339). She states that just like the Catalans and the Bretons, dozens of records were produced at regular intervals. Although Marti was the most prominent of the singers there were a large number<sup>5</sup>, including Patric, Mans de Breish, Miquela, and Marie Rouanet. What was significant is that they were not merely restoring

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<sup>1</sup> The crisis caused by the end of the post 1968 period in France

<sup>2</sup> The fact that no Occitan rock music exists (whilst it is a very real force in Catalonia and the Basque country) is significant.

<sup>3</sup> The spearhead of the militancy of the 1970s.

<sup>4</sup> The support for claims which were somewhere between cultural and political, defending a language which had been eclipsed, indeed prohibited, and denouncing the economic problems which extended over the Occitan regions.

<sup>5</sup> Formaggio states that between 1969 and 1976 about 30 singers emerged. (Formaggio 1976: 223)

and rejuvenating traditional Occitan folk music, but were creating lyrics which were highly politicized, and sometimes referred to third world problems, Vietnam and Cuba, as well as describing the economic problems of the rural workers of Occitania (Formaggio 1976: 225). Their political engagement led them to be active in Lutte Occitane and VVAP (see Chapter 6.4), and influenced the manner in which they operated, the majority of the singers acting as a form of cooperative. Rouquette established Ventadorn, a record publishing business, with the profits from each record being invested for the production of later ones (Formaggio 1976: 227). Opinion is divided on the significance of the music. Jeanjean found that several of the people he interviewed for his study of the Occitan movement referred to the major impact made on them by their first contact with the music, but that they tended to be amongst those who already had a prior interest in Occitanism. For many it was a superficial enthusiasm, which though it may have contributed to a raising of awareness of Occitan issues, as Annie Zerby has stated (Zerby, A. interview November 2003), did not produce any real political engagement (Jeanjean 1992: 100). When Keating drew attention to the lack of Occitan rock music, he was presumably implying that no music existed which could reach out to the young. It should be pointed out, however, that the type of music performed by the militant singers of the early 1970s, could be described as both folk music and protest songs, both of which were fashionable among the young at that period. Writing of his involvement in the Occitan movement during that time, Valière states:

C'était ...la période des racines, l'effet Roots. La nostalgie de la musique folk saturait l'espace émotionnel.<sup>1</sup> (Valière 1995: 84).

Martel concludes that the decline of the music as a political force after 1975 was partly the result of the end of the fashion for folk music, and the fact that the public was no longer a public of 'believers', but of consumers looking for higher quality (Martel 1989: 16), and who found it 'ringard' (old-fashioned, out of date, 'naïf') that people should talk about politics in their songs (Jeanjean 1992: 102).

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<sup>1</sup> It was the period of roots...the Roots effect (a reference to the book which had a wide impact at that time). The nostalgia of folk music filled the emotional space.



In the 1990s a new type of Occitan popular music emerged, which though largely commercial in output, has had some political content, even if different in orientation from that of the 1970s. As Lavelle states, ‘elle s’est orienté vers le métissage et l’interculturalité’<sup>1</sup> (Lavelle 2004: 551). Los Fabulous Trobadors, originating in Toulouse, sing in a rap form, in a mix of Occitan, French, Arab, English, and other languages on occasions, whilst Massilia Sound System sing of the daily life of the ghettos of Marseille from which they originate (Jeanjean 1995: 103). Lavelle points out that the workers and peasants of the songs of the late 1960s and the 1970s are replaced as the subject of the protest song by the occupants of the multiracial housing estates and suburbs (Lavelle 2004: 553). Claude Sicre, the originator of Los Fabulous Trobadors, claims that ‘dès lors, la défense de l’occitan passe par la défense de toutes les cultures du monde’<sup>2</sup> (cited in Lavelle 2004: 553). Although the songs of these groups might introduce a few words of Occitan to a new, younger audience, and their support for anti-racist and tolerant attitudes is in line with one aspect of the Partit Occitan’s programme, it is unlikely that they contribute to mobilization of support for political Occitanism.

The conclusion that emerges from an examination of some of the mobilization methods used by the Occitanists, is that they existed in a greater variety in the period before 1976, that they were employed more widely in Languedoc than in other parts of Occitania, that they were of the type typical of social movement mobilization (see Chapter six), and that they reflect the social and cultural ambiance of post 1968 France. Lafont’s more recent assessment makes it clear that he identified these methods with a particular moment in time:

De tot biais, l’aventura del Teatre de la Carriera, la cançon de combat, los escruches teorics e las polemicas, tot aquò’s ara inscrich als cartabels de l’istòria. Quand se tornan dobrir los documents, escotar las voses, papier jaunit e disques rauques nos despaïson dins un retro un pauc ridicul, un pauc nostalgic.<sup>3</sup>(Lafont 1991: 128)

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<sup>1</sup> It is directed towards multiculturalism.

<sup>2</sup> From now on, the defence of Occitan is via the defence of all the cultures of the world.

<sup>3</sup> Whatever the case, the adventure of the Teatre de la Carriera, the militant songs, the theoretical and polemical writings, all these are now listed in the pages of history. When we return to open the documents, to listen to the voices, yellowed paper and hoarse sounding records, we are disoriented, in a past which is a little ridiculous, a little nostalgic.

It is clear that these methods were not replaced by methods of mobilization more appropriate to the changed circumstances. As Escartin, former member of the Partit Occitan, has argued (see Chapter 4.3.6), now that the Occitanists are working within the electoral system, there is a great need for the introduction of more proactive campaigning, more skilful relations with the media, and the use of advertising techniques, if the party is to get its message across to a wider audience. However, as has already been explained, the lack of finance on the part of the party limits the options available.

#### **10.5.4 The 're-writing' of history as a mobilizing agent**

Hechter, writing of regionalist groups' frequent references to the past, stated that 'it is not that these groups actually uncover evidence of their ancient cultural past as an independent people, most often such culture is created contemporaneously to legitimate demands for the present day goal of independence or the achievement of economic equality' (Hechter 1975: 38-39). This was the case of the Occitanists, who during the 1960s and 1970s produced histories of Occitania<sup>1</sup>, designed to create the concept of a homogeneous territory, whereas events had in the past been described in the context of the history of France. Martel has surveyed this development (Martel 1994). Of the works produced since 1960, he notes that they have a number of features in common. They attempt to find factors common to the history of the various provinces of Occitania. They share an approach which can be described as militant.

Il s'agit de dévoiler les 'mensonges' de l'histoire officielle française, accusée de déformer, au nom de la France éternelle, la réalité qui est la sujétion du peuple Occitan.<sup>2</sup> (Martel 1994: 309)

They tend to focus on certain events, especially where a north/south opposition is evident. One approach creates an almost racial identity to the history of the area, with the depiction of 'l'homme d'oc'<sup>3</sup> with a particular temperament (Martel 1994: 309). A second approach, more leftist and populist, focuses on a tendency of the Occitan population to adopt a rebellious attitude to a government which is seen as distant and repressive (Martel 1994: 310). In this context Martel has examined the particular 'use' which Occitan historians

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Dupuy, *Nouvel Historique de l'Occitanie*, 1975; Armengaud and Lafont, *Histoire d'Occitanie*, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> It is a question of exposing the 'lies' of official French history, accused of distorting, in the name of the eternal France, the reality, which is the subjection of the Occitan people.

<sup>3</sup> Oc man

have made of the Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade, seen as a persecution which ended a thriving culture and began the colonization of Occitania by the north (Martel 2002). Martel concluded that the impact of these reinterpretations remains limited. Even among militants these works lost their readership with the decline of political Occitanism after 1980. Outside of Occitan circles they made little impact, apart from a few polemical attacks on them by traditional French historians (Martel 2002: 185). Cholvy criticized the fact that the books were not the work of professional historians, often appealed too much to the emotions, and were guilty of abusive simplifications and preconceived schemes (cited in Sagnes 1982: 13). Sagnes noted a tendency to extend to the whole of Occitania characteristics specific to the Languedocian situation (Sagnes 1982: 13). Rokkan and Urwin have stated that ‘the history of any given territory has a significance in itself for the indigenous population independent of any scholarly historiographical standards’ (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 67). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, however, that the artificiality of this project in Occitania, in comparison with similar works in, for example, Brittany, Corsica, Catalonia or Wales, where a recognizable history as a unit exists, reduced its potential to act as a mobilizing force. Nevertheless, although the books themselves probably only had a limited readership, some of their themes, such as ‘une prédisposition occitane à l’hérésie, et...un goût inné pour la démocratie’<sup>1</sup> (Martel 1994: 309), were taken up by some of the actors in the social movement activity (see Chapter 6) in Occitania (Martel 1994: 311), and popularized in the protest songs of the 1970s (Martel 2002: 184), and thus can claim to have had an indirect influence.

## **10.6 The significance of the decision not to use violence**

One way in which the Occitan movement has remained distinct from the Corsican, Breton and Basque ethnoregionalist movements is in its attitude to the use of violence as a means of promoting its cause. The effect of this decision on their potential for media coverage has already been discussed above (10.5.2), but the contrast with Corsica also reveals the reduction in the likelihood of successive governments taking their programme seriously. As Olivesi observes, the Corsican question has been ‘on the government agenda since the beginning of the 1970s’, when a series of bombings took place prior to the French Prime

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<sup>1</sup> An Occitan tendency towards heresy, and an innate taste for democracy.

Minister's official trip to the island in 1974. He cites the fact that after the Corsican bombing of Bordeaux Town Hall in 1996 the Corsican case was described as 'a state affair' by a leading UDF politician (Olivesi 1998: 174), and this became even more the case after the assassination, in 1998, of the Préfet of Corsica (Dupoirier 2001: 3). Although there are additional factors, (referred to in Chapter 7.2), which made Corsica a special case, it is true that by focussing the government's attention on ethnoregionalist claims, violence may act as a lever on the government to make them consider concessions, as has occurred in Corsica. It can, however, have the opposite effect of provoking fierce repression, as in the case of ETA during the Basque campaigns during the Francoist regime in Spain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The fact that this in turn contributed to a 'process of radicalization', which 'helped to reinforce a section of the population's loyalty to Basque nationalist forces' (Acha Ugarte and Pérez-Nievas 1998: 101) shows the complexity of the judgement which needs to be made by ethnoregionalist groups as they decide on this issue. Della Porta and Diani stress that violence polarizes conflict, and forces people to take sides. It may thus alienate potential sympathizers, rather than reinforcing loyalty (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 177). The case of Corsica also illustrates other potential dangers of the resort to violence, as in the particular social setup in the island the violence employed by the clandestine political movements has, as Olivesi states, 'partly escaped their control', and become linked with common criminality amongst the clans and the socially dispossessed (Olivesi 1998:187-188).

The issue of a possible resort to violence by members of the Occitanist political groups has been discussed internally from time to time, but it has always been a minority point of view, and occurred mainly in the period between 1968 and 1976. Formaggio stated that (on the basis of an interview with Fontan in September 1973), the use of violence was not in principle excluded by the PNO, and that Lutte Occitane approved and found legitimate the Aleria incident in Corsica in 1975, which led to the death of two gendarmes (Formaggio 1976: 322). Jean Larzac, the militant priest, brother of Yves Rouquette, argued that violence was justified as a legitimate means of action to impose a solution to the problems of the 'midi viticole' (Formaggio 1976: 323). The latter situation should however be considered separately from the wider Occitanist claims. Tarrow cites Mann, who argues that the southern French wine growers have used violence against property so consistently

in their campaigns, ‘that dumping wine on the roads and invading government offices is for them virtually an institutionalized form of protest’ (Tarrow 1998: 95). On the occasion when violence escalated with the use of firearms, at Montredon (see Chapter 6.5), the confrontation with the CRS led to two deaths and numerous injuries, which provided a psychological shock. It also acted as a reminder that any resort to violence in France comes up against the combined forces of the State, the police and the army. In spite of their largely non-violent image Occitan militants were under observation in the early 1970s. Formaggio describes the occasion, on April 21, 1975, when on police orders about forty Occitan militants, including the singers Marti and Rosine de Peire, and members of Lutte Occitane, VVAP and Cévennes Occitanes, were interrogated at home. This occurred at 6 a.m., under orders from Paris, and arrests were followed by searches. It was part of the judicial inquiry into an attack on property carried out by an isolated group signing itself ‘Farem tout Petar’<sup>1</sup> (Formaggio 1976: 441), and came at a period of general repression of ethnoregionalist activists in France, including Basque refugees in the French Basque Country, and a wave of arrests in Brittany. When, during the night of January 1 to January 2 1976 another isolated Occitan extremist group, ‘groupe –Baader-Jacquou le Croquant’ exploded bombs in front of five estate agents in Sarlat in the Dordogne, leaving graffiti which stated ‘Occitanie pas à vendre’ and ‘Occitanie vaincra’<sup>2</sup>, the local committee of VVAP immediately put out a press release making it clear that it had nothing to do with the events. They seized the opportunity, however, whilst condemning the use of violence, to criticize the effect that property speculation and the purchase of second homes had had on the local economy and society (Revolum 31 January –February 1976: 5). Formaggio’s conclusion was that by 1976 the violence of Occitan groups was largely ‘une violence de mots’<sup>3</sup>, and that physical violence was the work of a few isolated militants (Formaggio 1976: 324).

The issue of the use of violence was raised during meetings of some of Touraine’s research groups in 1979. At a meeting of the Carcassonne group Jean Larzac expressed an extreme

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<sup>1</sup> We will make everything explode.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Occitania is not for sale’, and ‘Occitania will win’.

<sup>3</sup> Verbal violence.

opinion, not excluding 'l'idée d'un recours à la lutte armée pour l'indépendance'<sup>1</sup> (Touraine 1981a: 129). Although some of the group, under his influence, expressed a desire for violence, even if it was simply the reflex of those who found themselves 'le dos au mur'<sup>2</sup> ('Alaric' in Touraine 1981a: 129), the majority followed the line of 'Firmin', a teacher and member of VVAP. He argued that:

Le recours à la violence ne peut que couper le mouvement du pays et le démanteler; c'est le discrédit, la provocation ... on nous coupe de la population et c'est terminé.<sup>3</sup> (Touraine 1981a:133)

The Partit Occitan has always made it clear that it is opposed to the use of violence, on both ethical and practical grounds. In their website they state that they do not think the use of force is appropriate to their situation, and that they prefer to take the democratic route, even if they make less impact as a result. They add that the regions where violence is used, Corsica, the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, have big problems in seeing an end to it, and reiterate 'nous sommes un parti politique démocratique et non-violent'<sup>4</sup> (partitoccitan.free.fr/pocqfpl accessed 16/5/04).

Given the small numbers involved in political Occitanism, and the potential for repression on the part of the French State, this is indeed, leaving aside all moral issues, the only practical approach to take. It is a decision which has however, as demonstrated above, ramifications for their impact on the political scene, by reducing the potential firstly, for media coverage of their opinions, and secondly, for exerting leverage upon the government.

## 10.7 Concluding comments

A constant theme of the thesis has been the existence of a large number of impediments to the successful dissemination of Occitan political ideas. This chapter has examined in more detail the reasons for resistance, or indeed lack of interest, within certain specific sections of the population. It has then carried out an evaluation of the options open to the

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of a resort to armed struggle for independence.

<sup>2</sup> With their backs to the wall.

<sup>3</sup> The resort to violence can only split the movement from the region and break it up. It will bring discredit, and act as a provocation. Once we are cut off from the population, we're finished.

<sup>4</sup> We are a democratic and non-violent political party.

Occitanists to attempt to counter this indifference, and the effectiveness or otherwise of methods which have been employed. The conclusion must be that all the methods adopted have not proved sufficient to counter 'les réticences du public envers la revendication occitane dans le sud de la France'<sup>1</sup> (Bidégaray 1997: 21).

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<sup>1</sup> The reluctant attitude of the public towards Occitan claims in the south of France.

## Chapter 11 Conclusions

### 11.1 Introduction

The thesis has examined firstly the way in which the political wing of the Occitan movement evolved between 1974, a point at which it appeared to have the potential to make an impact on the French political scene, and 2000, when the onset of a new millenium led members to engage in some degree of analysis of what, if anything, had been achieved, and the prospects for the future. Alirol, in his preface to 'L'Occitanie face au changement' (Alirol et al 2001) asked 'allons-nous rester les éternels *et cetera* des discours et autres publications relatifs aux langues et identités régionales?'<sup>1</sup> The research programme which led to this thesis was the result of an awareness, held over many years, that though aspects of the Occitan language and literature, and its history in the medieval period, have been the objects of academic research, the contemporary Occitan movement has tended to be regarded in academic circles as just such an *et cetera*, to be evoked briefly, and often inaccurately, in studies of other regionalist or nationalist movements. This thesis has aimed to redress the balance by making it the focus. By relying to a large degree on the internal documentation of the political groups it has been possible to present the account from the micro-level. The frank self-critique which exists in these documents, in contrast to the content of purely polemical material, contributed to the establishment of the analysis.

Having detailed the growth and decline of the various political groups within the movement, it has been established that the comparatively high public profile attained by Occitanists as a result of their association with social movement activity during the 1970s was not maintained and was never subsequently regained. The entry of the political wing into the formal electoral environment of France with the establishment of the Partit Occitan in 1987 did not achieve the hoped-for breakthrough, and electoral results have been uniformly disappointing, being consistently within the one to three percent range, apart from a limited number of higher scores linked to the prestige within a local community of an individual such as Alirol. Membership levels of the various organizations are such that

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<sup>1</sup> Are we always going to remain as the perpetual *et cetera* in speeches and publications about regional languages and identity?



they remain 'groupusculaire', a pejorative term to describe small, and by implication insignificant, political groups. It is fair, therefore, to talk of the marginalisation of the political wing of the Occitan movement during this period, particularly as during the same period the Corsican ethnoregionalist movement has maintained a high profile, and as a result of pressure on the French government has secured some concessions.

Secondly, therefore, the thesis examined the reasons for this marginalisation. Whilst acknowledging the contribution of previous authors, such as Touraine (1981), Keating (1986) and Jeanjean (1992), who, as referred to at appropriate points in the body of the thesis, indicated some of the weaknesses of the movement, the thesis has extended the analysis in a number of ways. Most obviously, it has been possible, by updating the study chronologically, to observe how the movement responded to changed political and economic circumstances over time. The impact in the longer term of the decentralization measures of the 1980s, and the growth of Front National influence within Occitania, have been discussed. More significantly, the originality of this thesis lies in the fact that it has demonstrated the importance of considering the movement in relation to the whole of the Occitan territory, rather than focussing on the narrower territory of Languedoc. It is contended that only by an accurate representation of this territory, its geography and its demographic patterns, can the difficulties which political Occitanism has had to face, and the differences which mark it out from other French regionalist movements, be understood. Additionally, the significance of leadership issues as a source of weakness has been subjected to detailed analysis. Another aspect of the interpretation of the sources has been to expose the extent to which the public persona and influence of Lafont, and to a lesser extent Rouquette, have distorted the perception gained of the movement as a whole, and influenced the way in which it has been represented by some analysts such as Keating (1986) and Salvi (1998).

This chapter has two main objectives. Firstly, it provides a synthesis of the factors which have been identified as the reasons for the marginalisation of political Occitanism in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Secondly, it examines briefly what activists consider to have been achieved, in spite of this marginalisation, and considers what, on current

evidence, may be the possible future course of the movement. The chapter concludes by indicating an area of further research relating to political Occitanism, for which the current study would act as groundwork.

### **11.2 The reasons for the marginalisation of political Occitanism**

Chapter 2.2 and 2.3 identified a number of variables which in conjunction could contribute to the likelihood of an ethnoregionalist movement being successful, in terms of mobilizing its target population, and exerting pressure on central government to achieve its aims. The analysis which was subsequently carried out leads to the conclusion that the conditions for the effective mobilization of ethnoregionalist activity were not fulfilled sufficiently to enable the Occitan movement to act as an effective political force in France in the period 1974 to 2000.

The thesis has identified a wide number of factors, both internal in terms of organizational structure, ideology and leadership, and external, in terms of the political environment within which it operated, and its geographical and demographic context, which have contributed to the weakness of the political wing of the Occitan movement. The leadership of the Partit Occitan in recent years has admitted the significance of the influence of the latter point, by stating that quantitatively Occitania represents the most significant minority of western Europe, with thirteen million inhabitants distributed in a territory which covers 190,000 km<sup>2</sup>, a third of France, but that factor is what makes it impossible for France to consider granting it autonomy (Alirol 1999b: 4). As Viaule points out in the website of the party, 'si l'on peut accepter d'un point de vue français la sécession de la Corse ou de la Bretagne, reconnaître le problème occitan, c'est mettre en cause la construction même de l'Etat français'<sup>1</sup> (<http://partitoccitan.free.fr/pocqfp1.htm>, accessed 16/5/04). Furthermore, the extent and diversity of that territory is such that 'la société occitane ne s'est jamais posée elle-même dans sa globalité'<sup>2</sup> (Alirol 1999b: 4). As Keating has pointed out, regional identity and its relationship to political action is complex. He refers to the cognitive aspect, in that people must be aware of the region and its geographical limits, and the ways in

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<sup>1</sup> If from a French point of view one could accept the secession of Corsica or of Brittany, recognizing the Occitan problem would mean calling into question the very construction of the French State.

<sup>2</sup> Occitan society has never presented itself in its entirety.

which it is distinguished from other regions. The affective aspect is the way in which the population feel about the region, and perceive it as providing 'a framework for common identity and solidarity' (Keating 1998: 86). As has been illustrated in Chapter 7, the population of Occitania does not relate to the territory in either of these ways, although there is evidence of an identification with sub-regions, which has acted as a counter to the efforts to create a pan-Occitan political organization. The territory is distinguished only by its linguistic markers, and as Chapter 5 and Chapter 7 have discussed, a range of factors, including government policy, social mobility and demographic change have continued to erode any potential which this might have as a unifying factor to act as a springboard for political action.

Given this profoundly negative context to the efforts of political Occitanism, how does one explain the period between 1968 and 1976 when Occitanism, though described as the 'petit garçon'<sup>1</sup> alongside the movements of the Corsicans, Bretons and Basques which had become active since 1970 (Formaggio 1976: 488), could at least be recognized at a national level in France and spoken of alongside those other movements? As has been explained in Chapters 4.2 and 6, this relatively euphoric period for Occitanism, which led Jeanjean to refer to its utopianism (Jeanjean 1992), is explained as much by its historical context as by its inherent potential to make a real breakthrough. Political Occitanism, which had begun to emerge with the internal colonialism debate in the 1960s, exploiting under the influence of Lafont the perceived economic imbalance between Occitania and Northern France, in the post-1968 environment seemed to tap into the 'zeitgeist'. 'Gauchisme', ecology, 'small is beautiful', 'roots': all of these concepts were to some extent incorporated into the themes put forward by Lutte Occitane and then by VVAP. The willingness of the left in France, in this period, to consider the prospect of decentralization, and the association of Occitanists with the left at a time when the 'double appartenance', membership of an Occitanist organization and a political party, was permitted, gave access to some degree of influence on national policy-making. Lafont strongly emphasizes his contacts with Mitterrand (Lafont interview November 2003). The major reason, however, for the apparent success of Occitanism during this period is its association with the social movement activity linked

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<sup>1</sup> Beginner

to the Larzac campaign and that of the viticulteurs of Languedoc. Formaggio stated that the movement was relying more and more on the social struggles within Occitania as its means of taking root (Formaggio 1976: 496). The apparent extent of that 'rootedness' was in fact illusory, and the areas concerned formed only a small part of the Occitanian territory.

As the external environment changed, the inherent weaknesses of political Occitanism meant that it went into decline in the period 1979 to 1985. The resolution of the Larzac affair, the changed circumstances of the Languedocian viticulteurs, the fact that economic crisis nationally meant that there was no longer a case for arguing for the 'internal colonialist' exploitation of the south: these factors removed some of the mobilizing themes for the Occitanists. When the socialists came to power in 1981 there were expectations of the achievement of some of the aims of the regionalists, but by 1986 there was disillusionment at what was seen as the inadequacy of the decentralization measures, and the failure to implement the anticipated programme to create 'le droit à la différence' culturally. The measures which were passed did in fact harm the Occitanists' cause in a number of ways. Firstly, though they were limited in effect, they were sufficient to make those of a moderate persuasion abandon the campaign for more extreme measures, and thus contributed to the further decline in membership numbers. Secondly, in the longer term, by the creation of elected councils for the administrative regions they contributed to the circumstances in which Occitanist themes were recuperated and used for local government purposes by regional politicians.

1987 marked a transitional point in political Occitanism with the creation of the Partit Occitan. As has been illustrated, this decision to enter the formal electoral environment of France has not halted its marginalisation. The attempt to create a pan-Occitan organization has been hindered by the localism of areas such as Provence and Béarn, and the revival, albeit on a small scale, of separatist or extreme left groups within the movement, thus recreating the factionalism which had been a feature of the Occitanism of the 1970s. Although the Partit Occitan integrated with other minority regionalist and nationalist groups within France and within western Europe, in RPS and ALE, and has embraced the ideas of the 'new regionalism', this has not improved its ability to make advances at

elections. Its potential to acquire votes from disaffected and dealigned voters has been eroded by the continued expansion of the influence of the Front National within the southern portions of Occitania during the 1990s, based on the substrata of support for the extreme right which has been a feature of the supposed 'Midi rouge', and fed by immigration and unemployment figures in the south.

Although Jeanjean identified a change in Occitanist attitudes from the utopianism of the early 1970s to the pragmatism of the 1980s (Jeanjean 1992), this has not succeeded in overcoming the basic extraneous problems, or those which existed within the organizations. The press has continued largely to ignore the Occitanists, or to adopt a negative attitude if it does mention them. The problem of finance has meant that the resources are not available to mount an effective campaign at times of elections. The divided leadership of the 1970s has been replaced by Alirol, who has imposed a 'respectable' image on the main organization, but who has not succeeded in creating a dynamic impetus to extend it much beyond a long-serving core of loyal supporters.

It is instructive to consider the movement's own evaluation of its situation at the turn of the century. In a series of examinations of the contemporary situation in 1999 Alirol stated that the movement had not responded sufficiently to the social and economic changes of the previous twenty years, arguing that 'le mouvement occitan n'a renouvelé ni ses analyses, ni ses objectifs immédiats ou à plus long terme, ni ses pratiques'<sup>1</sup> (Alirol 1999a: 5). He went on to state that though the claims put forward were perfectly just in absolute terms, they were 'déconnectés...des préoccupations et des aspirations concrètes de la population'<sup>2</sup>, and that it should be remembered that the most effective period of Occitan political action had been when the Occitan idea had coincided with social aspirations, with the theme of 'volem viure al país' (Alirol 1999a: 6). An analysis in *Lo Lugarn*, the journal of the PNO, described the Occitan political movement as 'faible, divisé et malade'<sup>3</sup> and argued that if Occitania was ever to have an existence other than sentimental, in a way comparable to the existence of Catalonia, the Basque Country, Scotland and Wales, it was now necessary for

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<sup>1</sup> The Occitan movement has renewed neither its analyses, its immediate or long term objectives, nor its practice.

<sup>2</sup> Out of touch...with the concerns and real aspirations of the population.

<sup>3</sup> Weak, divided and sick.

the Occitan political movement to gain a share of power at local and regional level (Hilaire 2001 ).

Jeanjean was interviewed for *La Setmana* during his visit to France in 2000, and asked to comment on the evolution of the movement since his previous visit. He stated that it appeared to have fallen back on hyperlocalism, and a focus on narrow linguistic, literary and cultural aspects, with less and less action on social and economic issues. He criticized the lack of professionalism of those involved with the political wing, and the fact that they were not very visible to the public between elections (Jeanjean 2000: 4-5). When Alirol was interviewed by Chartier and Larvor he said that he believed that the right /left polarization had become reinforced, leaving little electoral space for small parties, and that some of his erstwhile supporters were beginning to argue that the party should associate itself more closely with the left, as in the 1970s. He stated frankly:

J'étais très pessimiste à un moment. Je le suis redevenu. Je pense que nous rentrons dans une période difficile<sup>1</sup>. (Chartier and Larvor 2004: 280)

It might appear from this analysis that the Occitan political movement has achieved nothing, and has no future. In spite of the prevailing air of pessimism, the introspection which took place within the movement was not entirely negative. Claims were made for some achievements in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and tentative proposals were made for a way forward. These are considered below.

### **11.3 Achievements since 1974**

There is some consistency on the part of Occitanists with regard to their analysis of what was achieved in this period. Alirol has summarized the views, citing the fact that the term Occitan had entered into common usage to designate the language, it had gained at least a limited access to the radio and television, and the creation of the Calandretas and bilingual classes in the state educational system had provided a forum for its renewal. He attributed to pressure from Occitanists the fact that all the Occitan Conseils Régionaux had budgets allocated for the promotion of regional languages and culture, even though the prevailing hexagonal policy is anti minority languages. The Institut Occitan had been established at

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<sup>1</sup> I was very pessimistic at one time. I am again now. I think that we are entering a difficult period again.

Pau, and CIRDOC at Béziers. He described these results as ‘progrès...souvent plus symboliques que substantiels, mais progrès non négligeables cependant’<sup>1</sup> (Alirol 1999a: 6). Escartin cited similar achievements, and added that the Partit Occitan has at least kept the topic in the public arena (Escartin interview June 14 2004). Lafont, as well as highlighting these factors, argued that the Occitanists had contributed significantly to the circumstances which had led to the decentralization measures of the 1980s, but has stated that political Occitanism’s achievements ended in 1981 (Lafont 1998: 10).

It should be pointed out that the wider public dissemination of the use of Occitan symbolism, such as the cross of Toulouse, or ‘Cathar cross’, and Oc signs, in the commercial world, which began during the period in the mid 1970s when Occitanism had its highest profile, and which has continued to the present day as part of the branding of some regional produce within Occitania, in no way represents any commitment to, or even awareness of, the political aspirations of Occitanism. An extreme example was the ‘Oc Fast Food’ cafeteria which existed in the 1980s on the Allées Paul Riquet at Béziers, selling among other things Ocburgers!

It can be seen that most of the results are associated with the culture and language, rather than with the attainment of the purely political aims of the movement. In discussion, Philippe Hammel, (the director of APRENE which trains teachers for the Calandretas), responded to the question as to whether the Occitan movement must be considered a failure by saying that objectively in many ways the answer must be ‘yes’, but ‘au moins la langue n’est pas morte’<sup>2</sup> (Hammel in discussion September 11 2002). There is a case for arguing that the purely cultural organizations such as the Institut d’Etudes Occitanes and the Félibrige could not have secured this result alone, without the politicization of the Occitanist cause, and its impact in the 1970s. As such, it is a not inconsiderable achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> Progress, often more symbolic than substantial, but not insignificant, nevertheless.

<sup>2</sup> At least the language isn’t dead.

#### 11.4 Political Occitanism: a role in the future?

It is tempting to conclude that there is no prospect of Occitanism playing a political role in the future. One can hypothesize that with the retirement from active politics of the ageing cohort of militants who have been involved since the 1970s, and the problems which have been identified in attracting young people to the cause, it is likely that the ‘groupuscules’ will simply wither away. This was the scenario which was suggested in conversation by one admittedly disaffected former activist. A transitional stage might include a decline into ‘l’enlèvement folklorique ou patrimoniale’<sup>1</sup>, something which Alirol has perceived as a risk (Alirol 1999b: 4). There might still be a role for groups which survived and campaigned over local issues, perhaps in conjunction with ecological groups, as the committees of VVAP had done in the past. However there are indications that this ‘minimalist’ interpretation is being challenged by efforts to reinterpret the aims of the movement, and to justify its existence by mapping out a role at two levels, the national and the European, or by attaching itself to the ‘altermondialist’ campaign against aggressive globalization.

At the national level, it is argued that Occitanism can continue to have ‘une fonction publique...tribunitienne’ (Coulon 1989:6) providing a platform for people to express their views. This is not such a realistic aim as when in the 1960s and 1970s it provided a means of expressing resentment against economic and social changes within Occitanian territory, and a voice for those hostile to the excessive centralization of the French political system. To some extent the Front National is now fulfilling the role of mouthpiece of the disaffected. There has been a change of focus therefore on the part of at least the Partit Occitan. Rather than putting forward its ideas on political autonomy, it is now putting emphasis on support for the campaign, in conjunction with other regional minority groups, to obtain the modification of Article 2 of the constitution, and ratification by France of the European Charter on Minority and Regional languages. It still aims to get some more elected officials, who should then campaign for example for a regional perspective for town and country planning, and tax benefits for local firms within Occitan territory (Alirol 2004: 6), but does not explain how these electoral breakthroughs can be obtained.

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<sup>1</sup> Sinking into a ‘folklore’ or heritage interpretation of Occitanism.



A second dimension, which is being heavily promoted as a vision for the future, is the European dimension, particularly in conjunction with the Catalans. This was being suggested by the late 1980s, but has been further promoted in recent years. Alirol has argued that militants must abandon any nationalist perspective in favour of the building of a European perspective, and that Occitans should consider themselves as Occitans without necessarily denying their French identity, and in the future their European identity (Alirol 1999b: 4). Lafont in particular has maintained that the delineation of territory has changed, and that trans-state interregional policies are making sense of natural links which state based territorial policies denied. He argues that ‘la réalité d’un espace occitan s’impose de plus en plus aux décideurs européens comme celle d’un ensemble occitano-catalan et celle d’un bassin méditerranéen occidental’<sup>1</sup> (Lafont 1998: 10). In this context, an additional motivation is obtained for the promotion of the Occitan language. It has been described as ‘un esperanto sud-latin’<sup>2</sup>, which can contribute to personal and economic communication within this potential Euro-region (Surre Garcia 1989: 127-128). To some extent the Occitanists are simply accepting what is being carried out within the hexagonal political system, with the links between Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon and Catalonia (see Chapter 8.3). The idea of closer links between Occitanists and Catalans did take a small-scale practical form in the 2004 regional elections in France, when a combined autonomist Occitan and Catalan list (which obtained 1.27% of the vote) stood in Languedoc-Roussillon. Working with other minority regionalist groups within both RPS and ALE Occitanists hope to influence policy in Paris and at Brussels in a way which would not be feasible alone. The fact remains however that much of their involvement in these organizations has been in practice due to Alirol’s personal commitment to them, and thus may well decline when he retires from activism.

The third option is for the Occitanists to attach themselves to the ‘altermondialist’ movement in France, which campaigns for a world-wide ethical social movement against aggressive economic (and cultural) globalization, and in favour of environmental responsibility, economic justice, human rights and cultural diversity. This is the vision

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<sup>1</sup> The reality of an Occitan space is increasingly compelling recognition by European decisionmakers as an Occitano-Catalan bloc, and a western Mediterranean economic area.

<sup>2</sup> The author cites as very basic example the fact that the bilingual roadsigns for Toulouse/ Tolosa make the sign recognizable to Catalans, Italians, Portuguese and Spanish.

which Lafont now has for the future. His interpretation is an avowedly utopian one, in which he envisages in the future a period when states and their frontiers will have disappeared. Although not able to be present, because of ill-health, at the large ‘altermondialist’ gathering on the Larzac in summer 2003, he established a group with a manifesto ‘Gardarem la tèrra’, or ‘we will look after the earth’, which was deliberately designed to recall the slogan ‘Gardarem lo Larzac’ of the 1970s. He argues that the problems which led him to criticize the ‘internal colonialism’ of the 1960s and 1970s are now planetary problems harming entire societies, and believes that the situation is now so different that new organizations are needed, which will not work on a narrowly Occitan level, but will incorporate multiple themes (Lafont interview November 2003). There is a suggestion however that this link between Occitanists and ‘altermondialists’ may not be entirely welcome on either side. There was a revealing incident in the film ‘Larzac 2003’ which appeared on the French regional programme ‘Viure al País’. After footage of José Bové, and Occitan musicians such as Patric and Massilia Sound System, there was a point where anti-globalization speeches were interrupted by a man who introduced himself as a militant of the Partit Occitan, and who expressed resentment that no mention was being made of political Occitanism. The faces of those around, on the platform and among the audience, expressed a variety of emotions, but largely embarrassment or amusement. There was no evidence of a positive response. Alirol discussed the issue of ‘altermondialism’ during the Eighth Congress of the Partit Occitan in January 2004. He agreed that there were valuable aspects of this new political trend, which looked beyond narrow nationalist themes, and stated that the Partit Occitan was in sympathy with the basic premises of the movement. He expressed concern, however, that claims in terms of Occitan identity might be ‘mise sous le boisseau’, or swept under the carpet. He noted also the danger that altermondialism saw itself as ‘un nouveau messianisme’ and concluded that it was asking the right questions, but not providing the answers (Alirol 2004: 7). Chartier and Larvor also observed the difference between Lafont’s enthusiasm for altermondialism, and the reservations of other Occitanists.

Dans ‘Gardarem la tèrra’ il n’hésite pas à relier la dynamique du Larzac des années 1970 au mouvement altermondialiste. A 80 ans, Robert Lafont ne craint pas de s’engager sur un terrain regardé avec circonspection par certains militants qui estiment que la revendication sera noyée dans la mouvance Bové, comme elle l’a

été en soutenant l'union de la gauche dans les années 1970<sup>1</sup> (Chartier and Larvor 2004: 303)

Apart from the first 'minimalist' suggestion, all the above scenarios for a role in the future for political Occitanism share a common feature. They place the Occitanists in a minor and subsidiary role, requiring them to move away from the most overtly political aspects of their programmes. Though by this means a continued nominal existence might be possible, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Occitanism, other than in its cultural guise, is unlikely to have any impact on the French political system, and that if changes to the system come about they are likely to be the result of the activities of other groups, notably the Corsicans and the Basques. Jeanjean in 1992 argued that the Occitanists had moved from utopianism to pragmatism. The prevailing tone of their writings in recent years suggest that they have moved from pragmatism to pessimism. Lafont has stated that he no longer sees his way towards 'l'analyse qui pourrait servir ...de levier pour soulever la conscience occitane'<sup>2</sup> (Lafont to Sumien 29/06/ 97 published in Har/Far supplement 9 June 1998). He has also stated publicly, however, in the film made by Passuello in 2001, that 'l'engagement occitaniste ne te demande pas de réussir pour continuer'<sup>3</sup>, and it may be this belief which means that Occitanism will continue, though inevitably still as the *et cetera* in relation to the other regionalist movements in France.

### 11.5 Proposal for further research

As outlined in the first chapters, this thesis has aimed by means of documentary and textual analysis to update the history of political Occitanism from 1974 up until 2000, and to identify the reasons why during this period it became increasingly marginalised. Chapter 11.4 has indicated the possibilities for the future. It is apparent that the current period is one of transition. The 'great names' of the 1960s and 1970s, Rouquette and Lafont, are no longer active within the political organizations. The generation who were influenced by

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<sup>1</sup> In 'Gardarem la tèrra' he doesn't hesitate to link the dynamic of the Larzac of the 1970s to the altermondialist movement. At 80, Robert Lafont is not afraid of committing himself on an issue regarded with circospection by certain militants who believe that their claims will be drowned in Bové's sphere of influence, as happened when they supported the Union of the Left in the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> The analysis which could be used as a lever to arouse Occitan awareness.

<sup>3</sup> The commitment to Occitanism doesn't require you to succeed in order to continue.

Rouquette and Lafont, and who have maintained what seems to the outsider an exceptional level of commitment to the cause in spite of continual disappointment as to the results obtained, are now reaching an age where they are likely to reduce their active involvement. In his speech at the Eighth Congress of the Partit Occitan Alirol referred to the 'jeunes amenés à prendre la relève'<sup>1</sup> (Alirol 2004: 7). It would be useful to investigate the political organizations during this transitional period, using a different methodology from that employed in the current research programme. By visiting a representative sample of local committees throughout Occitania, attending the meetings of central organizations, and by carrying out a wide number of interviews, it would be possible to assess the motivation of members, and investigate in an in-depth fashion the potential of the movement to survive and evolve to adapt to a changed internal as well as external environment. Whether such a research programme would meet with the cooperation of the Occitanists is however problematical. It has been pointed out already that the survey carried out by Touraine and his team in 1979 and 1980 provoked considerable hostility among many activists.

### 11.6 Concluding comments

The analysis carried out here has focussed on the micro-level, with the intention of presenting political Occitanism from within the movement, but at the same time it has placed the movement in its wider political, geographical and demographic context. It has demonstrated that whatever the efforts of committed militants, they are labouring against a greater number of counter factors than militants within other French ethnoregionalist movements, particularly the Corsican and Breton movements. The fundamental problem of the nature and extent of Occitan territory means that any proposals for autonomy appear as unrealistic. It is also the case that, as Alirol has stated:

En Occitanie, il n'y a pas d'unité historique, il y a un fonds culturel. Ce n'est pas le passé qui justifie quoi que ce soit du contenu occitan.<sup>2</sup> (Chartier and Larvor 2004: 282)

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<sup>1</sup> The young people induced to take over.

<sup>2</sup> There is no historic unity to Occitania, there is a cultural heritage. It isn't the past which justifies anything in the content of Occitanism.

The Occitan territory which has gained most in terms of concessions is the small amount within Spain and Italy, where the recognition of the language has been the result of a political environment in recent years more sympathetic towards cultural diversity than that within France. Whether there is a future for Occitanism, what form it will take, and the likelihood of it attaining some of its objectives, will depend therefore not only on the potential for the organizations to survive the period of transition from the generation which experienced at least part of what Lafont has called the ‘vingt glorieuses’<sup>1</sup> of Occitanism (Lafont interview November 2003), but also on the evolution of the external political environment within France.

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<sup>1</sup> The twenty glorious years ( the 1960s and 1970s).

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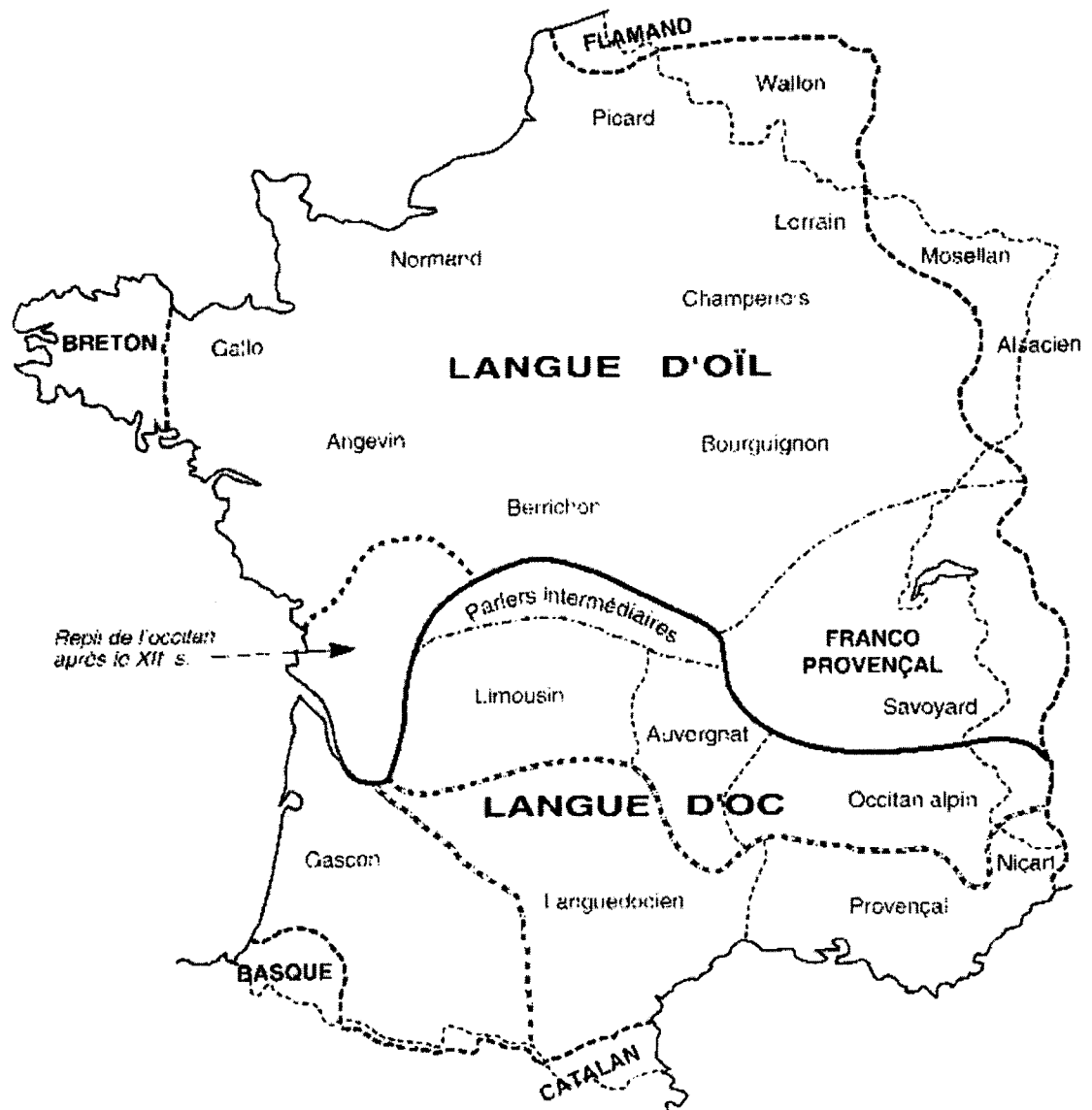
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## INTERVIEWS

- Jordi Escartin Montpellier November 4 2003  
 Pailhès November 5 2003  
 Pailhès June 13 2004
- Yves Rouquette Béziers September 13 2002  
 Béziers September 24 2003
- Robert Lafont Béziers September 25 2003  
 Montpellier November 4 2003
- Anne Marie Zerby Béziers November 5 2003

René Zerby Béziers November 6 2003

## Appendix 1



The Regional Languages of France and the principal dialects

Source: Laux, 2001

## Appendix 2



Source: Escartin, 2000

### **Appendix 3**

#### **PRINCIPAL PRIMARY SOURCES USED (other than published books)**

**Internal bulletins:** Lutte Occitane 1971-1978

VVAP 1974- 1986

Partit Occitan 1987- 1998

**Newsletters of regional sections of Partit Occitan:** La Letra Occitanista (Aude) 1988-1992

Lo Cebier (Var) from 1990

Lo Faidit (Paris) 1987-1991

**Publications of activists:** VVAP-Languedoc 1978-1981

Revolum 1975-1976

Lutte Occitane 1972-1977

Païs Occitan 1978- 1980

Occitania (VVAP) from 1981

Aici e Ara 1979- 1983

Amiras 1982- 1989

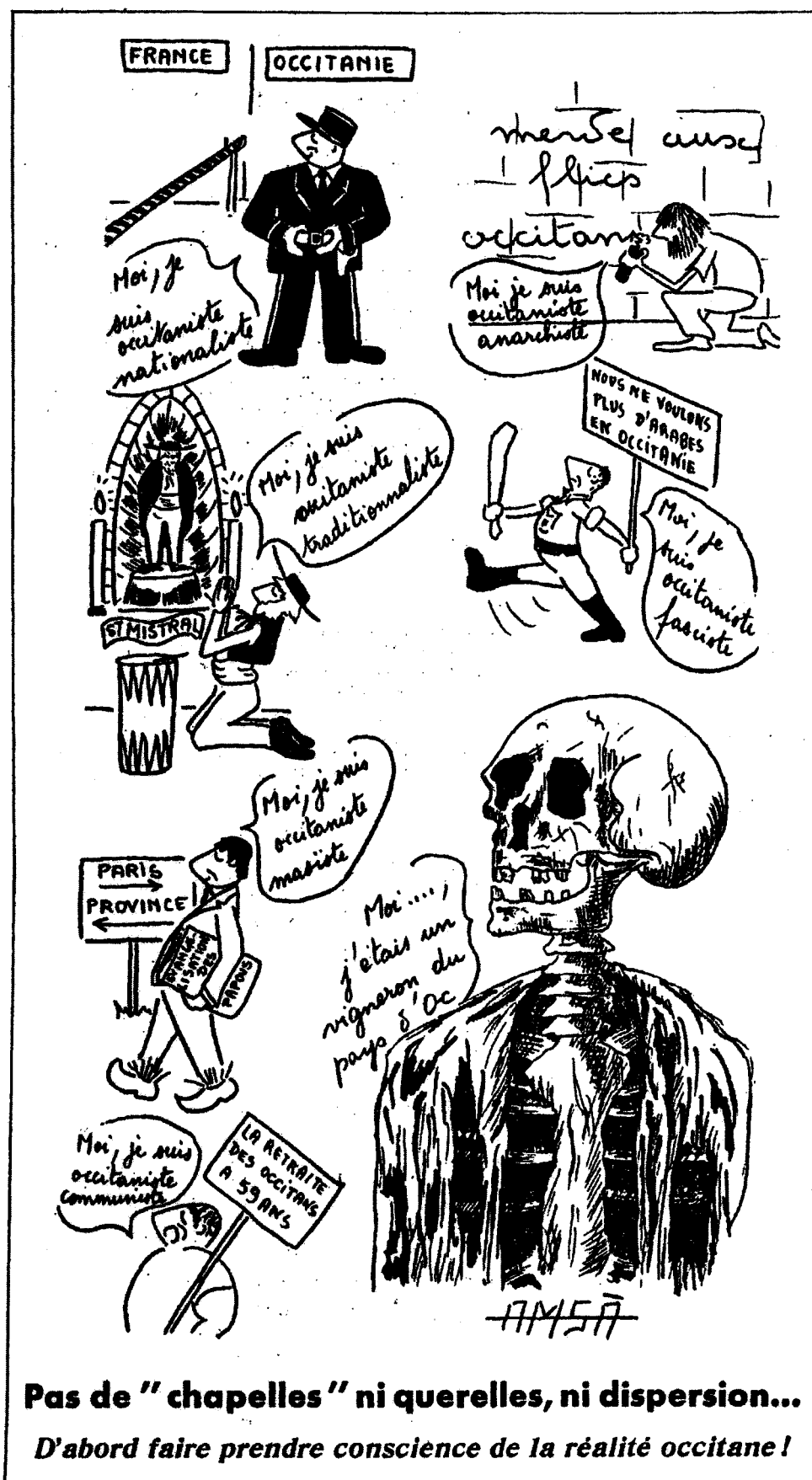
Har/Far from 1995

**Specialist newspapers:** L'Echo des Corbières (CAV) 1971-1978

La Setmana (from 1995, a weekly newspaper in Occitan, containing cultural and political information about Occitania)

**Website:** <http://partitoccitan.org>

# Appendix 4





## **Appendix 5 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|        |                                                                  |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ALE    | Alliance Libre Européenne                                        |
| CAV    | Comités d'Action Viticoles                                       |
| CFDT   | Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail                  |
| CGT    | Confédération Générale du Travail                                |
| CIDO   | Centre International de Documentation Occitane                   |
| CIRDOC | Centre Inter-Régional de Développement de l'Occitan              |
| CONSEO | Conférence de Nations sans Etat d'Europe Occidentale             |
| CPNT   | Chasse, Pêche, Nature et Tradition                               |
| CROC   | Corrent Revolucionari Occitan                                    |
| CRS    | Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité                               |
| DATAR  | Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale |
| FN     | Front National                                                   |
| IB     | Internal bulletin                                                |
| INSEE  | Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques    |
| MIVOC  | Mouvement d'Intervention Viticole Occitan                        |
| MPM    | Média Pluriel Méditerranée                                       |
| PACA   | Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur                                       |
| PCF    | Parti Communiste Français                                        |
| PS     | Parti Socialiste                                                 |
| PNO    | Parti Nationaliste Occitan                                       |
| P.Oc   | Partit Occitan                                                   |
| RPS    | Régions et Peuples Solidaires                                    |
| VVAP   | Volem Viure al Païs                                              |